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## 'My mind on paper': Anne Lister and literary self-construction in early-nineteenth-century Halifax

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**'My Mind on Paper': Anne Lister and Literary Self-Construction in Early-Nineteenth-Century Halifax**

by

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## **Abstract**

Anne Lister (1791-1840), a provincial gentlewoman of Shibden Hall, near Halifax in the West Riding of Yorkshire, produced between 1806 and her death a four-million-word diary documenting her daily life, intimate thoughts, ambitions, sexual and emotional adventures with women and her musings on the nature of her sexuality. About a sixth is written in cipher.

Lister scholarship so far has focused mainly on the social and cultural implications of her writings. This thesis, however, examines the diary as a literary text and considers Lister's deployment of literary forms and structures, strategies and conventions in producing a sense of self. It explores her relationship to contemporary ideas of authorship and to notions of public and private, and investigates the impact of reading in the autobiographical writing of Lister and her circle and the significance of the cipher in her social and sexual self-representation. It asks whether her literary production helped accommodate her self-representation as a traditional country gentlewoman with her unconventional sexuality.

The linking theme throughout the thesis, bringing together the many different aspects of Lister's self-fashioning, is the significance of literary considerations in her diary and letters. It begins the work of investigating the literary structures and strategies of her writings, and offers a fresh perspective on this remarkable work of literary self-construction.

## **Acknowledgements**

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I would also like to thank Pat Sewell and staff at Calderdale Archives and Reference Library, Halifax; North Yorkshire Record Office, Northallerton; the University of Birmingham Library, and Peter Holliday and staff at Leominster Public Library.



## Note on text and abbreviations

### Abbreviations

CR: Letters and Papers of Henrietta Matilda Crompton and her Family, North Yorkshire Record Office, Northallerton, North Yorkshire.

SH: The Diaries and Letters of Anne Lister, Shibden Hall Muniments, Calderdale Archives, Halifax, West Yorkshire.

RAM: Phyllis Ramsden Papers, Calderdale Archives, Halifax, West Yorkshire.

### Text of Anne Lister's Diary and Correspondence

I have taken the quotations from Anne Lister's diary and letters that appear in this thesis from the following sources: Helena Whitbread's two selections of transcriptions from the diary, *I Know My Own Heart: Anne Lister's Diaries 1791-1840* (1988), and *No Priest But Love: The Journals of Anne Lister 1824-1826* (1992); Jill Liddington's study, *Presenting the Past: Anne Lister of Halifax 1791-1840* (1994), which contains some brief passages of transcription, and Liddington's selection of transcriptions in *Female Fortune: Land, Gender and Authority: The Anne Lister Diaries and Other Writings, 1833-36* (1998); transcriptions by Hazel Brothers in her essay, 'Framing the Shibden Hall Portraits: A Commission Fulfilled by Anne Lister during an Awkward Stay in London, 1833' (1996). All other quotations are taken from my own transcriptions of the original manuscripts housed in the Shibden Hall Muniments, Calderdale Archives, Halifax. These are referred to throughout the study by their record numbers in the Muniments, and where these do not

indicate a specific page of manuscript, a date is given in the text, or in parenthesis, as in, for example: (SH: 7/ML/E, 3 November 1816).

Anne Lister and Eliza Raine used a cipher in parts of their diaries and letters. I have distinguished transcriptions from encrypted material by italicizing them. This is a procedure also observed by Liddington. Brothers marks encrypted passages by enclosing them within the symbols < ... > , but for consistency, I have italicized these in this study. Whitbread does not signal the appearance of encrypted script, and in the case of quotations from this source, I have been unable to distinguish plaintext from enciphered text.

## Contents

|   | Page number |
|---|-------------|
| Acknowledgements  | i           |
| Notes on text and abbreviations   | iii         |
| Contents  | v           |
| Introduction  | 1           |
| Chapter 1: ‘Ambition in the literary way’: The Writerly Author                    | 21          |
| Chapter 2: ‘Books! Ye are my spirit’s oil’: The Readerly Author                   | 73          |
| Chapter 3: ‘Peculiar writing’: The Encrypted Author                               | 117         |
| Chapter 4: Love and ‘erotics’: The Amatory Author                                 | 161         |
| Chapter 5: ‘Acquiring more importance’: The Relational Author and the Social Self | 209         |
| Conclusion  | 255         |
| Appendix 1: Who’s Who in Anne Lister’s Diary                                      | 267         |
| Appendix 2: Anne Lister Chronology  | 273         |
| Appendix 3: Key to Anne Lister’s Crypt Hand                                       | 277         |
| Appendix 4: Figure 1: Example of Anne Lister’s crypt hand writing                 | 279         |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Figure 2: Example of Eliza Raine's crypt hand writing    | 281 |
| Figure 3: Example of Anne Lister's plaintext handwriting | 283 |
| Figure 4: Sample entry from Anne Lister's diary          | 285 |
| Appendix 5: Figure 1: Portrait of Anne Lister            | 287 |
| Figure 2: Shibden Hall in 1835                           | 289 |
| Figure 3: Design for Improvements to Shibden Hall, 1836  | 291 |
| Figure 4: Shibden Hall today                             | 293 |
| Bibliography   | 295 |

## Introduction

In August 1816, Anne Lister, a gentlewoman of the West Riding of Yorkshire, stayed at Buxton, the famous Derbyshire spa. She was on her way to visit her dearest friend, Marianna, who had recently married Charles Lawton, of Lawton Hall, Cheshire. She was accompanied by Marianna's sister, Anne Belcombe. Lister was twenty-five and Belcombe six years older. During the day the two women bathed in the curative waters, walked on the promenades, met with acquaintances and fussed about the state of their laundry. At night they shared a bed, a routine practice for genteel women on a tight budget. One night, 15 August, according to her diary, Lister confessed to Belcombe of having a '*partiality to the ladies*', although the next she hurriedly '*contradicted all*' (SH: 7/ML/E). Later that year, Belcombe stayed with Lister at her home, Shibden Hall, just outside Halifax, and the matter was broached again. While once more they passed their days in the peaceful visits, walks, and gossip typical of women of polite society, their nights together in bed were altogether more eventful. Lister reiterated to Belcombe her '*penchant for the ladies*', and now '*expatiated on the nature of my feelings towards her and hers towards me*'. Such a declaration rapidly led her to attempt '*great lengths*' of physical intimacy with Belcombe, '*such as feeling her all over pushing my finger up her etc.*'. But when Lister '*asked her several times to let me get nearer to her and have a proper kiss* [bring her to orgasm]', Belcombe declined the offer '*languidly*' though '*as if she would by no means have disliked it but as if she thought it right to refuse*' (SH: 7/ML/E, 8 November 1816). Questioned by Belcombe about the propriety of such behaviour, Lister '*urged in my own defence the strength of natural feeling & instinct*' (SH: 7/ML/E, 13 November 1816).

These amorous episodes are discreetly veiled by Lister's 'crypt hand' (Whitbread, 1988: 142), an idiosyncratic cipher she employed in about a sixth of the diary she kept from 1806 until her death in 1840. They epitomize the aspect of the diary that caused a sensation in 1988 when Helena Whitbread published her first selection from the encoded diary, *I Know My Own Heart: The Diaries of Anne Lister 1791-1840*. Were these explicit lesbian sex scenes truly the work of an early nineteenth-century woman?<sup>1</sup> Was a lesbian sexuality (as we might think of it today) even possible in that period? This latter question has tended to preoccupy critics and readers of *I Know My Own Heart*, and Whitbread's later selection of transcripts, *No Priest But Love* (1992). Their response is scarcely surprising. The life revealed in the extracts from Lister's encoded diary is shockingly at variance with what is expected of a provincial lady of this period. In 1816, for example, the year that Lister 'went great lengths' with Anne Belcombe, Jane Austen published *Emma*, a novel praised by Sir Walter Scott for 'describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life' (quoted in Tomalin, 1997: 252). This 'ordinary life' depicted by Austen was drawn from a similar social milieu to that of Lister and Belcombe, the commercial, professional and gentry families characterized by Amanda Vickery, in her study of Georgian women's lives, as 'the genteel' (Vickery, 1998: 1). The fictional Emma Woodhouse is 'handsome, clever, and rich'. Her father has 'an easy fortune' (Austen, 1966: 38), but her mother's death and sister's marriage has left her 'mistress of [her father's] house from a very early period' (Austen, 1966: 37).

Lister portrays herself in her diary as certainly clever, if not handsome.<sup>2</sup> In 1816 she was not yet rich, although she would eventually come into her fortune. She was born in Halifax in 1791 into a family of poor gentry. Her father, Jeremy Lister (1752-1836), was an army

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<sup>1</sup> Jill Liddington cites Elizabeth Mavor as sceptical of the diary's authenticity (Liddington, 1998: xv & 253n).

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 5, figure 1, for a portrait of Anne Lister.

captain who fought in the American War of Independence. She frequently describes him as ungentlemanly and improvident. According to her diary and correspondence, alcoholism progressively destroyed the health and social abilities of her mother, Rebecca Battle (d.1817). She had four brothers, two of whom died in infancy, and another, John, at fourteen. Her favourite brother, Samuel, was drowned in 1813, leaving Lister and her younger sister, Marian, as survivors of a family in social decline. Lister describes her early childhood as 'a great pickle' (Whitbread, 1988: 2). At seven years old she was expelled from her dame school in Ripon, where, she later recalls, she was 'whipped every day' (Whitbread, 1988: 227). In 1805 she was sent to the Manor School in York, a smart girls' boarding-school, where for just over a year she mixed with young women from wealthy, professional and minor aristocratic backgrounds, several of whom became her close friends, and, in one case at least, her lover. As she had no independent fortune of her own at this time, her attachment to her well-off female lovers encompassed both her amorous and social ambitions, and, as her diary demonstrates, her love affairs became entangled with her desire to raise her standing above the sunken fortunes of her parents. For example, Marianna Lawton (née Belcombe), the recently-married friend whom she visited in Cheshire in 1816, was also her lover. Lister appears to have thought of her marriage to Charles Lawton as security for their future relationship. The projected early death of Lawton, who was older than Belcombe, was to have left the lovers in possession of his house and fortune. In the event, he outlived Lister. The diary recounts her many other affairs and flirtations with women. As the entries above show, her passion for Marianna Belcombe did not prevent her from exploring her desire for her sister Anne.

From 1815 until 1826, Lister lived at Shibden Hall, a large country estate on a hill a mile or so above Halifax, West Yorkshire, as a guest of her uncle and his unmarried sister. At their invitation, she increasingly took responsibility for estate and household management.

Through the most rigorous self-discipline she accomplished a startling range of diurnal activities, including six hours of study, close supervision of agricultural and industrial business, a hectic social round, and several thousand words of diary- and letter-writing. Financial independence came in 1826, when, on the death of her uncle, Lister inherited Shibden Hall. Her new-found wealth enabled her to enjoy long trips abroad, travelling with various female companions throughout Europe. Her last tour, to Russia, with her partner, Anne Walker, proved to be fatal. She contracted a fever and died in Koutais, in the Caucasus mountains, in 1840.<sup>3</sup>

In 1816, however, Lister was, like Emma Woodhouse, an educated young gentlewoman of conservative but independent opinions and mistress of an estate. Rebecca Lister's rapid decline the following year, would leave her, again like Emma, motherless. The comparison between the fictional character and the diarist falters, however, when it comes to their amorous relations with women, for Emma's intimacy with her friend, Harriet Smith, intense as it is, is confined to 'admiring those soft blue eyes' (Austen, 1966: 54), and choosing a husband for her. When Harriet spends the night at Emma's home at Hartfield, she stays firmly in 'a bed-room appropriated to herself' (Austen, 1966: 84).

Emma Woodhouse is a paradigm of the provincial gentlewoman against whom Lister is sometimes measured.<sup>4</sup> Like Austen's heroines, Lister frequented the fashionable resort of Bath, and at eighteen (a couple of years older than was usual) 'came out' into society at the Assembly Rooms during the 1809 York season. Her diary for that year shows her as capable as Emma of employing a censorious yet proper tone:

[27 February 1809]

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 1, 'Who's Who in Anne Lister's Diary', and Appendix 2, 'Anne Lister Chronology', for further details of Lister's life.

<sup>4</sup> Amanda Vickery, for example, who sets Lister outside the boundaries of what was acceptable to genteel society (Vickery, 1998: 12), writes, 'as every reader of Jane Austen knows, proper young girls grew up in a certain social seclusion' (Vickery, 1998: 267).



... Miss Bramley and her sister Mary Anne went off with their father for town where each is to receive the last polish of elegance and the finishing touch to a perfect education of the present day now it is as necessary for a fine lady to finish her education in London as for a tradesman to serve an apprenticeship ...! God be thankful that I have not been and that I am not about to go to this hot bed of young ladies ... (SH: 7/ML/E).

The piquancy of Lister's snooty contempt for 'this hot bed of young ladies' is thrown into ironic relief by her 1816 revelations. How can the ascerbic, Austenesque subject of this unencoded passage be reconciled with the persistent, forceful, lesbian lover conjured up by the indecorous, yet clinical, prose of the crypt hand extracts above? The answer has often been to focus on one of those aspects of Lister's self-representation to the exclusion of the other. Until Whitbread's pioneering 1988 transcriptions, the general reader was shielded from the improprieties of the sexually explicit encoded passages. The Bradford antiquarian, Arthur Burrell, for example, recommended at the end of the nineteenth century that the diary, this 'very unsavoury document', be burned (Liddington, 1994: 15). Twentieth-century commentators have tried to avoid the controversial material by being inexact. M.E. Kendall's 1950 essay 'Miss Lister's Diary Extracts and Comments' skirts past the 'many entries referring to ... young ladies', describing them as 'rather on the superficial side' (Kendall, 1950: 70) Even in the late 1960s, the historian Phyllis Ramsden glossed the encoded passages euphemistically as 'long accounts in crypt-writing of [Lister's] sentimental exchanges with her friends, excruciatingly tedious to the modern mind ... of no historical interest whatever' (Liddington, 1994: 20-21). Jill Liddington believes, however, that the pendulum has swung too far the other way, with the emphasis now placed excessively upon the lesbian content of the diary. She argues, in *Female Fortune: Land, Gender and Authority: The Anne Lister Diaries and Other Writings, 1833-*

36 (1998), that although ‘Lister’s writings do indeed offer a major contribution to righting the erasure of lesbians from history ... the representations emerging from this crucial recuperative work do leave her oddly decontextualized’ (Liddington, 1998: xvi). Terry Castle is one of the culprits named, her chapter on Lister in *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993) apparently ‘wrenching Anne Lister completely from her historical roots’ (Liddington, 1998: xvi). Liddington proposes instead that ‘the Anne Lister evidence offers the historian a unique opportunity to track in enthralling daily detail how one determined masculine woman challenged ... many of the conventional boundaries shaped by class, gender and heterosexuality ... prompting a reappraisal of social relationships at the very dawning of the Victorian era’ (Liddington, 1998: xiv).

### **Present-day scholarship of Anne Lister’s diary and other writings**

Most of the detailed work on Lister has come from a historical or cultural perspective, and until now there has been no full-length critique from a literary critical perspective of Lister’s diary-writings. Liddington’s two seminal studies, *Female Fortune*, and the earlier collection of essays, *Presenting the Past: Anne Lister of Halifax 1791-1840*, focus closely on the value of the Lister evidence to the historian. The former includes a new selection of transcriptions from Lister’s later writings, accompanied by a detailed examination of their economic and social setting. The latter surveys the significance of Lister’s diary and letters in the local history of Halifax and the West Riding of Yorkshire, and investigates the development of Lister scholarship. Helena Whitbread’s vital contribution to this continuing programme is two volumes of selected transcripts from the diary. Each volume provides a useful contextualizing introduction, and the second is accompanied by scholarly

footnotes, and brief biographies of people mentioned by Lister, but, as in Liddington, there is no attempt to evaluate Lister as a writer or place her in a literary context. The same is true of Muriel Green's transcriptions from the Lister letters, published in 1992 as *Miss Lister of Shibden Hall: Selected Letters 1800-1840* and based on the more extensive work of her 1938 Library Association thesis. Like Whitbread, Green comments on the biographical, geographical and historical circumstances of Lister's textual production. A Lister chronology, summarizing the contents of each diary entry, was produced by Phyllis Ramsden between 1958 and 1969, and is a valuable resource for the researcher. A short essay by Hazel Brothers, 'Framing the Shibden Hall Portraits: A Commission Fulfilled by Anne Lister during an Awkward Stay in London, 1833' (1996), offers a pleasing vignette of an episode recorded by Lister, together with some of her own transcriptions from the diary and letters.

All these scholars, as well as contextualizing and commenting upon Lister's writings, have provided later researchers and critics with a great deal of invaluable primary source material. The manuscripts of Lister's diary and letters, retained by Calderdale Archives in Halifax, are not easy to read. The encrypted passages require deciphering. The key is easily available<sup>5</sup> and the work for the transcriber is laborious rather than difficult, for Lister generally employed a clear legible hand for her cipher, printing out each symbol distinctly.<sup>6</sup> Some ingenuity is required, however, in deciding where words and sentences begin and end, for there are no spaces between words, little punctuation and few capital letters in these passages. Each transcriber has adopted a different approach to presenting the crypt hand entries. All separate individual words, for obvious reasons, but Whitbread, Green and Brothers have attempted to make the diary more accessible to the general reader

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<sup>5</sup> John Lister, a distant descendent of Anne Lister's family, and his friend Arthur Burrell produced a key to Anne Lister's crypt hand in the late nineteenth century. It is this key which is still available in Calderdale Archives, Halifax. For an updated key, see Appendix 3.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 4, figure 1, for an example of Lister's crypt hand writing.

by inserting punctuation marks as they think appropriate, and sometimes guessing at illegible words, which they add in square brackets. Liddington follows this procedure less frequently, and only where she believes the sense of a passage would otherwise be lost. It presents a problem to the textual analyst, however, for unless she returns to the original manuscript, she must rely on the transcriber's interpretation of grammatical meaning. Unencoded passages present more problems to the transcriber than those in crypt hand, for, particularly in the diary and draft letters, Lister's writing is small and cramped, and she uses many idiosyncratic abbreviations, although conventional punctuation usually appears in these passages.<sup>7</sup> Liddington clearly indicates which of her transcribed passages are enciphered in the original manuscript by italicizing them.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, Whitbread and Green do not make this distinction (although most of Whitbread's selections are transcribed from the crypt hand).

Anna Clark's essay 'Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity' (1996) is one of the few studies to consider the significance of Lister's literary influences. Clark argues that Lister 'created her lesbian self out of romanticism and classical knowledge' (Clark, 1996: 49). Although Clark's concern is with the construction of lesbian sexuality and not with literary self-representation, her examination of Lister's reading habits and the links she identifies between these and Lister's self-identification as lesbian usefully points the way to a literary study of the diary.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to these studies and transcriptions, which are devoted in their entirety to Lister's writings, there are a number of other works which situate Lister within a wider cultural context. The period covered by Emma Donoghue's *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801* (1993) ends just before Lister began her diary, but

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 4, figure 3, for an example of Lister's plaintext handwriting.

<sup>8</sup> Brothers, in her short essay, encloses encrypted passages with the symbols <...>.

<sup>9</sup> Clark does not distinguish encoded from unencoded text in her brief transcriptions.

Donoghue acknowledges the importance of her writings to a history of lesbian culture. Ros Ballaster briefly alludes to Lister's documentation of lesbian desire in her essay, "'The Vices of Old Rome Revived': representations of female same-sex desire in seventeenth and eighteenth-century England' (1995). The argument pursued in Terry Castle's 'decontextualizing' chapter from *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993) is that Lister's writings provide 'an alternative to ... lugubrious myths of lesbian asexuality [in earlier historical periods]' and demonstrate that 'the embodied love of woman for woman has been a part of life far longer than many have assumed' (Castle, 1993: 106). Martha Vicinus, in an essay in which she examines the lives of real and fictional lesbians of the past, "'They Wonder to Which Sex I belong": The Historical Roots of Lesbian Identity' (1996), assesses the 'new insights into the life of a self-consciously mannish lesbian' offered by Lister's diary (Vicinus, 1996: 245). Lister is mentioned in Liz Stanley's study, *The Auto biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto Biography* (1992). Stanley usefully sites Lister within a paradigmatic survey of women's autobiography. Her concern with autobiographical theory and practice, however, is located within the arena of feminist sociology and cultural politics.

Most of the works listed here concentrate on the importance of Lister to the recovery of the history of lesbian identity and experience, and although they are interested in what the texts reveal, they do not offer a literary analysis of their production (except perhaps in the case of Stanley) or place them within a literary setting. Lisa Moore, however, adopts the latter approach in her essay "'Something More Tender Still than Friendship": Romantic Friendship in Early Nineteenth-Century England' (1996), in which she sets out Lister's relations to the literature of the period. While noting that Lister's 'nonfiction ... produced for [her] a less problematic - though paradoxically more socially disruptive - form of identification [than the novel]', Moore argues that 'Lister's appropriation of male-authored

texts allows her to produce a self-representation that exceeds the limits on female behaviour these texts themselves work to produce' (Moore, 1996: 32). 'Whether swearing off literature, quoting it, or burning it', Lister was, Moore suggests, in constant 'interaction with texts', (Moore, 1996: 33). Although Moore provides detailed commentaries on other texts of her period, Lister's writings are used to reinforce her argument about the shifting meanings of romantic friendship, and do not receive especially close textual attention.

### **A literary perspective on Lister's writings**

A number of questions arise from the ever-growing body of Lister scholarship produced by social and cultural historians. Why did a moderately well-off, conservative gentlewoman write over four million words of private diary?<sup>10</sup> How did she conceive of such a project, and how did she proceed with it, or even persist with it? What or who were her models? In the following chapters I propose to supply fuller answers to these questions. They examine the Lister evidence as a literary text, investigate the form this evidence takes and consider its relationship to literary conventions and traditions. This investigation in its turn throws up other questions. How is the 'enthalling daily detail' of the diary produced? Does the diary engage with imaginative possibilities in a similar way to other works of literature? Do contemporary notions of authorship inform its production? A close analysis of the literary strategies and effects of Lister's diary may reveal how an account of the diurnal activities and intimate feelings of 'one determined masculine woman' challenges conventional boundaries. It may also go some way to showing how the designations 'determined' and 'masculine' may be construed from Lister's writings. The discussion of

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<sup>10</sup> By comparison, Pepys filled six volumes with one-and-a-half million words.

the devices and methods of Lister's self-construction offered here is intended to illuminate these concerns.

Is it fair to subject Lister's private diary to the same kind of critical scrutiny as, for example, Jane Austen's novel, *Emma*? Is the private diarist susceptible to literary constraints and conventions in the same way as the novelist? If she is, what is the significance and what are the outcomes of this? This study seeks to answer these questions and show the value of such an approach. What literary techniques does Lister adopt to recount conversation, for example? Does she use direct or reported, tagged or untagged speech? Does she frame her accounts of meetings, events, or amorous intrigues by narrative devices of introduction and closure? How does she convey thought? These questions are important to understanding how Lister produces meaning in her writing. As the extracts from her 1809 and 1816 diary, reproduced above, show, Lister not only used different scripts - encrypted and unencrypted - but employed different kinds of language and style to convey different meanings. Liddington warns that 'contemporary readers may raise a perplexed eyebrow at this rather startling mix of sexual subversion with the orthodox Lister dynasty of ancient Shibden Hall' (Liddington, 1998: xiv), but the impression of incongruity or fragmentation arising from the combination of apparently disparate material may perhaps be averted by close textual analysis of Lister's diary and letters. By illuminating the question of *how* Lister varied her style and language, and on which occasions and with which topics, such an analysis may reveal diversity rather than disparity. By exposing shifts and developments in Lister's literary production, it may also elucidate the process of her self-construction and help reconcile apparently incongruous aspects of her self-representation..

This study examines Lisa Moore's proposition that Lister constantly interacts with texts. However, it extends the focus of Moore's brief observation to encompass a much wider

investigation of Lister's writing and reading practices, her mode of production, and her relations to the processes of literary self-construction. My first chapter, 'The Writerly Author', considers the literary conditions within which she produced her diary and developed her distinctive writing style. What were her relations to contemporary notions of authorship, and how did she conceive of her literary project? I examine the models of authorship available to women, and trace the changes and developments in the status and remuneration awarded to women writers towards the end of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century. Mary Collier, who was a washerwoman as well as a poet, wrote in 1765: 'I think it no Reproach to the Author, whose life is toilsome, and her Wages inconsiderable, to confess honestly, that the view of putting a small Sum of Money in her Pocket, as well as the Reader's Enjoyment, had its Share of Influence upon this Publication' (quoted in Todd, 1989: 131). As Collier noted, the title 'author' bestowed on its holder both the status of a profession and the means to a livelihood. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Lister first embarked on her diary, women were encountering difficulties in situating themselves and their writing within the literary establishment. Nevertheless, authorship was an ambition they continued to harbour. Charlotte Brontë was born in 1816 (the year of Lister's visit to Buxton with Anne Belcombe) in the village of Thornton, in Yorkshire, and lived most of her life in Haworth, about 15 miles from Shibden Hall. She describes how she and her sisters 'had very early cherished the dream of one day becoming authors' (Brontë, 1993: xl). It is clear that by 'authors' she means published writers, for the Brontë siblings produced written texts of many kinds from a very early age (Gordon, 1992: 96). The word 'dream' indicates that they were not attracted to authorship simply for its uncertain financial rewards (indeed, they considered housekeeping, governessing, piecework-sewing and engraving as possible sources of



income before attempting writing as a profession), but for its imaginative and aspirational possibilities.

While the Brontës at last achieved publication for their poems and novels, Lister, who describes herself rather airily as '*castle-building about writing, publishing, and making my book pay my expenses*' (quoted in Brothers, 1996: 119), did not pursue this goal. By putting her literary energies into producing a private diary, she both freed and excluded herself from the demands of the literary establishment. If the chance of financial gain, critical acclaim, and public fame was diminished by this decision, however, the 'dream' of authorship persisted. Lister, without the expectation of these rewards, engaged in a writing practice which must have had a profound effect on the conduct of her daily life. The act of writing several thousand words a day with a quill pen on paper requires physical and mental stamina as well as good time-management and self-discipline. If she dreamed of fame, status and money arising from her literary efforts, what were the attractions for Lister of the private diary?

Harriet Blodgett, in her pioneering work, *Centuries of Female Days: Englishwomen's Private Diaries* (1989), usefully outlines the properties that constitute the private diary. She argues that it has 'neither an audience to impress with effects (except the diarist) nor a whole to arrange' (Blodgett, 1989: 5-6). It is produced by 'a writer chiefly living at the moment and expressing her immediate self rather than ... remembering the self that once she was or creating the self she would like to have been'. Its 'essential property' is the 'more or less dailiness of its entries' which are made 'periodically at dated intervals' (Blodgett, 1989: 21).

There are several respects in which Lister's diary fulfils these criteria, although they are neither wide enough to contain her actual practice nor narrow enough to exclude it. The diary documents the daily life of a provincial gentlewoman, detailing her relentless

programme of autodidactic study, social engagements, and estate business, her intimate thoughts, ambitions, sexual and emotional adventures with women, and her musings on the nature of her sexuality.<sup>11</sup> The entries are sequentially dated, suggesting that Lister wrote them more or less daily, even ‘periodically at daily intervals’. Nevertheless, despite the diary’s coherent chronology, the entries, as I shall show, were not necessarily produced in immediate or spontaneous response to the events and feelings they record. They are sometimes written, either from notes taken at the time or from memory, weeks or months after the date with which they are headed. Entries composed around the recorded time have often been corrected or edited at a later date. Lister may, therefore, have had some conception of a slightly different enterprise than a simple daily record; one, indeed, that could be regarded as ‘a whole to arrange’.

There is further evidence that Lister engaged with a larger project of self-representation. Her literary concerns extended beyond the act of writing into editorial, taxonomic, and archival procedures. For example, she provided nearly every volume of the diary with an index of, among other things, books read, people visited, letters sent and received, ailments and orgasms. As well as a diarist, she was a prolific correspondent, frequently writing twenty or so business and personal letters a week, some over seventy pages long. She kept letters received (often also copying them out in full in her diary) and drafts of letters she had written and regularly reviewed and catalogued her collection, shaping the chronology and narrative they produced by destroying items along the way. The following diary entry of 1817 suggests how she consciously envisaged a larger project taking shape from these procedures: ‘The general rummage among my letters & papers takes a great deal of time & puts me sadly out of my way - but as I have never had my things set to rights as they ought to be, ‘tis high time to begin if I mean to get it done in my lifetime’ (Whitbread, 1988: 16).

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 4, figure 4, for a sample diary entry.

Her diary also highlights the problem of what constitutes a private document. It was private in the sense that, unlike many early nineteenth-century diaries, it was not a shared or family document. Dorothy Wordsworth (1771-1855) and Fanny Burney (1752-1840), for example, produced their diaries in the expectation that they would be read and appreciated by members of their family. Lister did not permit her family access to her diary. She wrote it in specially-purchased volumes, usually alone in her room, and, according to her own account, often late at night. By using a cipher, she ensured that parts of it at least were, without the key, unreadable, even under close scrutiny. In her plaintext hand she employed many abbreviations, some conventional to eighteenth-century writing practice, some idiosyncratic. These may have been intended to speed up the writing process, but they also served to disguise its content from casual observers. Her plaintext handwriting is so cramped that it is frequently illegible. However, while many diarists, including Beatrix Potter (1866-1943) and Samuel Pepys (1633-1703), have used secret writing and cipher to provide extra security for their private journals, Lister complicated her crypt hand's function by distributing the key to her lovers, who subsequently used it in their own letters and diaries. She also occasionally read out extracts from her diary to lovers. It appears then that Blodgett's criteria for defining the private diary are called into question by Lister's literary production. She may, for example, have conceived of an audience and admitted the possibility of readers. The terms 'private' and 'public', as applied to the diary, are problematized by her reading it aloud to her lovers and her distribution of its cipher key. There are indications not only that she sometimes produced the diary retrospectively, but also that she had an idea of it as a 'whole to arrange'. The blurring of these boundaries in Lister's diary re-opens the matter of her relations to authorship.

If ideas of authorship figure significantly in Lister's literary self-narrative, what is the place of reading? In Chapter Two, 'The Readerly Author', I investigate the extent to which

Lister's self-construction was mediated through literary models by scrutinizing her reading patterns and educational timetables and by tracing influences and models among eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literature. As a child, for instance, she prepared herself for the life she subsequently led by reading books on agricultural practices, studying accounting and following her uncle's guidance on matters of estate management. Her intense interest in classical writers may not be solely attributable to her desire for intellectual superiority, but also might have been encouraged by its frequent allusions to homosexuality. I try to clarify the significance of Lister's reading patterns to her literary production by examining several passages of her diary and correspondence, and comparing them with extracts from contemporary novels and erotic or pornographic fiction. For example, the unencoded 1809 entry, in which Lister haughtily dismisses a fashionable school as a 'hot bed of young ladies ...' (SH: 7/ML/E), is carefully wrought to produce the effect of a clever but genteel young woman like Emma Woodhouse herself. Yet in Lister's encoded account of her night-time rendezvous, the language is a mixture of the euphemistically sentimental, as in '*penchant for the ladies*', the brutally suggestive, '*pushing my finger up her etc.*' (that '*etc.*' is quite chilling), and the romantically candid, '*urged in my own defence the strength of natural feeling & instinct*'. The style is not so much reminiscent of *Emma* as of an eighteenth-century erotic novel, like, for instance, John Cleland's *Fanny Hill, or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748-9). But was Lister familiar with such texts? How did reading figure in her life and what part did it play in her self-construction? This chapter searches for evidence of the readerly author among Lister's diary and letters and asks, how typical of her peers and contemporaries were her reading practices, and what kind of reader she had in mind for her own writing?

By reading aloud her diary and giving copies of the key to the cipher to her lovers, Lister seemed to acknowledge the possibility of a privileged readership, if not, ultimately, a

wider one. Why, then, did she bother with a cipher at all? Chapter 3, 'The Encrypted Author', looks at how and why Lister developed her crypt-hand. The use of ciphers or codes is not uncommon in diaries, but is it always immediately explicable by the need for secrecy? Was the desire to hide or disguise particular passages of her diary Lister's sole motive for employing cipher? What is the distinction between unencrypted and encrypted passages? Is there a pattern to the use of cipher and how do the encrypted and unencrypted passages relate to each other? In this chapter, I examine the way the crypt hand affects meaning in Lister's diary and letters and investigate the effect of enciphering on ideas of authorship. I ask how Lister envisaged her relations with readers of the encrypted text, and who she conceived those readers to be, uncovering in the process a bold literary experiment.

The women to whom Lister gave copies of the key were her lovers, or women who had received amorous advances from her. There were a remarkable number of these, most of them living in or connected with Yorkshire, and often in communication with each other. Chapter 4, 'The Amatory Author', surveys the ways in which this informal network of friends and lovers was constituted. Is it possible to detect evidence of what is now called a 'lesbian sexuality' in the writings of these late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century Yorkshire women? How are women who love women depicted in literature of this period? The chapter explores Lister's literary representation of her sexual identity and focuses on language and style in her description of her sexual feelings and experiences. How does Lister recount her many love affairs and flirtations? How does she characterize her sexuality? What was the significance of her schooling on her sexual self-construction? In her diary, Lister occasionally turns her gaze upon herself and upon her lovers and friends. I document her accounts of appearance and deportment and ask how she construes the response of her Halifax neighbours to her unorthodox self-presentation?

Lister relates her flirtations and sexual encounters, of which the 1816 diary entries above are a small sample, in explicit and exuberant detail. She was also interested enough in her sexuality to attempt an analysis of its origins and an interpretation of its nature: '*urged in my own defence the strength of natural feeling & instinct*' (SH: 7/ML/E, 13 November). Biddy Martin's essay, 'Lesbian Identity and Autobiographical Difference[s]' (1988), identifies a preference among present-day lesbian writers for the autobiographical form. She describes how many 'coming-out stories' and 'autobiographical essays' offer 'accounts of the process of becoming conscious of oneself as a lesbian, about accepting and affirming that identity against enormous odds' and notes that they 'assume a relationship of identification between the reader and the autobiographical subject' (Martin, 1988: 83-4). Here I investigate whether Lister may be an antecedent of these writers, using an autobiographical form that offers the possibility of both retrospective and daily identification. Her examination of her sexuality shows an awareness of the case against it, yet is both accepting and affirming: 'my conduct & feelings [are] natural to me inasmuch as they were not taught, not fictitious, but instinctive ... I had met with those who could feel in unison with me'. (Whitbread, 1988: 297). What relations did Lister envisage between herself as subject-writer and her reader? Was it one of identification? Did she suppose a reader who would be familiar with the experience of woman-to-woman sexuality, or did she rather expect a pedagogic relationship? Did she assume her reader would be conversant with the devices of romantic and erotic fiction and confessional autobiography?

However, as Liddington points out, Lister does not simply document the development of her sexuality in her diary, but devotes a large proportion of it to an examination and working out of her social ambitions, and to defining and consolidating her social relations. The practice of diary-writing was considered necessary to a lady's accomplishments in the

late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Conduct manuals like *My Daughter's Manual* (1837) instructed girls that their diaries should be 'a kind of second conscience, permanently recording the dictates of our internal monitor' (quoted in Blodgett, 1989: 38). Indeed, Vickery argues that women's private diaries of this period contributed to the maintenance of the conservative networks of polite society by reinforcing their shared values (Vickery, 1998: 11). Lister's literary account of her relationship with those networks is discussed in Chapter 5, 'The Relational Author and the Social Self'. Here I trace the shifts that take place in her self-narrative as she accommodates to changing occasions and fortunes and look at her construction of a social identity in her writings. Does the diary reinforce Lister's conservatism? Is this aspect of her self-construction challenged by her revelations of an unorthodox sexuality? This chapter links Lister's social ambitions to the establishment of her sexual identity, investigates how she dealt with the occasionally problematic congruence of these two aspects of self, and looks at the influence of two dramatically hostile events on her self-representation. Her gender might have been expected to compromise her active participation in the rural economy, for by the 1830s 'the negative effects on women who openly operated in the market' of 'the construction of domestic ideology and the lure of new patterns of consumption' were beginning to be felt (Davidoff and Hall, 1994: 272.) There was, however, a tradition of independent unmarried women landowners in the immediate locality of Lister's home at Shibden, including two who had attended the same school as Lister in York. They, like Lister, engaged in occupations such as estate management and supervision of agricultural activities that crossed gender boundaries. There were also networks of culturally and socially active women in the environs of Halifax, formally instituted in Female Friendly Societies, or more informally through the networks of professional and minor gentry families. Did Lister profit from the relative flexibility of social discourse in relation to

class and gender in this rapidly expanding provincial town, and from the status gained from her membership of an old county family? Here I explore her ideas of blood and rank, examine the way contemporary notions of propriety influenced her self-production as a country gentlewoman, and ask how she accommodated this with her sexual identity. How can her self-construction as the proper lady of the manor, who, like Emma Woodhouse, critically observes society from within the safety of the conservative establishment, co-exist with the outrageously improper seducer of Anne Belcombe?

The linking theme throughout all these chapters, bringing together disparate, and apparently irreconcilable aspects of Lister's self-construction, is the significance of literary considerations in her diary and letters. How did these affect their production? Were they mediating or moderating influences, or did they open up imaginative possibilities of self-exploration? How did the values of contemporary literature, Romanticism or the gothic, for example, impact on the development of Lister's self representation in these texts? Are ideas of authorship and distinctions between public and private challenged or reinforced by Lister's literary productions? How can a sexual self be constructed through textual means?

The huge body of Lister's writings held in the Shibden Hall muniments invites a stream of speculative questions. So far, those that relate to the literary functions and effects of the diary and letters have scarcely been addressed. This thesis begins the work of investigating the structures and strategies of those writings, offering a different and illuminating perspective on this remarkable work of literary self-construction.



## Chapter 1. 'Ambition in the Literary Way': The Writerly Author

In 1819 Anne Lister wrote in her diary of having an 'ambition in the literary way, of my wish for a name in the world' (Whitbread, 1988: 82). Lister, who was acutely sensitive to matters of class and rank, clearly regarded literature as an appropriate route to acquiring 'a name in the world' and yet to her, as to her female contemporaries, authorship was loaded with problematic notions about gender and status.

In this chapter I focus on a number of linked concerns raised by my examination of Anne Lister's diary. First is the question of authorship in relation to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women writers, and to Lister in particular. Although the quotation above is one of several references in Lister's diary to her ambitions to become an author, she does not appear to regard her literary production in diary and letters as qualifying her for that title, which she assumes is obtained by other means. I investigate the importance of explicit ideas of authorship to women writers in the years preceding and during Anne Lister's lifetime and ask, how is the cultural status of 'the author' articulated in their writing and how is that construct gendered?

My second task is to survey the traditions of diary-writing for women. The moral and devotional nature of many women's diaries often runs alongside a therapeutic role in which women rationalise and accommodate themselves to negative cultural traditions. Women diarists' sense of self may be dissolved by repressive conventions of subordination

even while they are the subject-centre of their writings. Here I argue that Lister's diary does not conform to this model and that she devised a self-constructive form that underpinned and reinforced her social and sexual identity, and her sense of self. The part Lister's diary played in her negotiations between the marginal, in for example her transgressive sexual identity, and the mainstream, in her adhesion to the norms of country landowning life, will be touched upon here, although a fuller account will be given in later chapters.

Lister's writing practice was an important mode of both individuated and relational self-production. It is a truism that the writer of short stories and novels constructs fictional characters by offering sufficient detail of the emotional, physical and experiential properties of an imagined person that the reader, supplying any omissions from their experience of life, and, in particular, of literature, is able to form a mental picture of them. Recent critical work explores the idea that the writer's self is also inscribed in her writing, whether or not this is obviously autobiographical, where it can be discerned from similar self-constructive clues. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, for example, propose that Mary Shelley's 'principle mode of self-definition' was through reading and writing (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 223), while Tony Tanner notes Charlotte Brontë's 'invisible presence' in her novel, *Villette* (1853) (Tanner, 1992: 63). Autobiographical writing, using tools derived from a range of literary sources, openly constructs a subjective identity for the writer. 'The self that is writing', as Sheila Kearns remarks, 'simply cannot be separated from the self that is written' (Kearns, 1995: 19). The process of writing a diary and self-definition are equally closely tied. Constrained by the nature of diary production to produce a regular (if sometimes retrospective) account of her own life, the diarist struggles with the limits and conventions of literature to produce a sense of her self within that account. The process itself may play a significant part in shaping, or constructing, that self.

‘the narration of the self cannot be separated from the interpretation of that narrative’  
(Kearns, 1995: 20).

However, as I argue in this study, Lister’s diary embodies both her individuated self, the self that exists for the diarist alone as subject, object and reader of her text, and a relational self that situates the writer within, and accommodates her to, her social world. In the third part of this chapter, therefore, I investigate the significance of writing in the lives of Lister’s female contemporaries in the Halifax area and ask how far Lister’s self-constructive activities were typical of their experience, and whether they shared her literary preoccupations. The chapter concludes by looking at Lister’s deployment of archival procedures in constructing a self-narrative not only from her own writings but also from those of her friends and lovers.

### **Authorship and women writers**

In the Introduction, I quoted Mary Collier’s comfortable designation of herself as an ‘Author’ even though one ‘whose life is toilsome, and her Wages inconsiderable’ (quoted in Todd, 1989: 131). Collier does not acknowledge the problematics that women writers came to associate with that term. Indeed, she was one of several eighteenth-century working-class women who augmented their earnings by writing. Mary Leapor, Elizabeth Hands and Ann Yearsley were all working-class poets who achieved recognition and attracted subscriptions and patronage to their publications. Yearsley, for example, had little education and the income from her verses supplemented her husband’s labouring wages. Her pen-name, ‘Lactilla’, was derived from her earlier occupation of selling milk from door-to-door (Turner, 1994: 62).

While women from the lower classes commonly wrote verse or letters, Janet Todd argues that ‘most novelists came from the middle ranks and lower reaches of the gentry’ (Todd, 1989: 132) and Cheryl Turner notes ‘the ascendancy of the middle class amongst literary women’ (Turner, 1994: 65). Their findings support the conclusions of earlier critics like Arnold Kettle that the novel was ‘an art-form written by and for the now-powerful bourgeoisie’ among whom ‘well-to-do women were the insatiable novel-readers of the time’ (Kettle, 1977: 28). It is estimated that women wrote nearly all of the two thousand novels published during the eighteenth century and that six hundred were written by the same hundred women writers (Tuchman, 1989: 48). While all these writers did not support themselves economically by their writing, their access to major publishers, like Joseph Johnson, and to wide-circulation magazines like the *Athenian Mercury*, shows that their work was greatly in demand. By the mid-eighteenth century women’s writing was the subject of critical acclaim in a number of publications. In 1752, George Ballard published *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain Who have Been Celebrated for their Writings or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts and Sciences*; in 1754, John Duncombe produced *The Feminead*, and in 1755, Bonnell Thornton and George Colman edited two volumes called *Poems By Eminent Ladies*. Ballard’s enterprise was subscribed to by a hundred and fifty-two women and two-hundred and fifty-six men (Uphaus and Foster, 1991: 2-3). However, the existence of such celebratory volumes, while acknowledging some women’s contribution to literature, hints at tokenism by the distinction it accorded to the few.

Many of the novels produced during the eighteenth century reinforced bourgeois ideological norms of correct behaviour for women and in the first part of the century their producers ranked highly as upholders of female virtue and accomplishment. Two early eighteenth-century women writers valorized as exemplars of their sex were Elizabeth Rowe and Penelope Aubin. Rowe’s religious prose fiction earned her the praise of Dr

Johnson as being in the class of writers ‘who please and do not corrupt, who instruct and do not weary’, and of Theophilus Cibber, who wrote: ‘Mrs Rowe might put some of the present race of females to the blush’ (quoted in Turner, 1994: 48). Rowe’s friend, Aubin, successfully combined an appropriate moral tone with ‘a very entertaining Variety of Incidents’ in her novels. Her rules for ‘a good Novel’ were strict: a ‘pure’ style and manner suitable for ‘inexperienced minds’; subjects that reinforced duty and benevolence; the punishment of folly or mistake; the reward of virtue, and ‘an Air of Probability, that the Example may have greater Force’ (quoted in Turner, 1994: 48-9).

Not all women novelists conformed to Aubin’s rules or accepted bourgeois norms. Those who transgressed them quickly lost rank or reputation. Eliza Haywood (1693-1756), novelist, playwright and poet, was the daughter of a shopkeeper, who, after a brief spell as an actress when her marriage ended, wrote a highly successful novel, *Love in Excess; or, The Fatal Enquiry* (1719), that launched her writing career. Between 1719 and 1755 she wrote forty-four attributable novels and novellas and probably several more under pseudonyms (Turner, 1994:177-83). Her racy, melodramatic plots of male lust and female innocence and the notoriety of her own troubled life (she was at one time briefly in prison) assisted her sales but led her to be regarded by the male establishment as a dangerous feminist, immodest, licentious and unfeminine. Pope satirized her in *The Dunciad*, as ‘yon Juno of majestic size,/With cow-like udders, and with ox-like eyes’ (II. 164-5) and made her the prize for a fictional urinating competition between publishers (Pope, 1963: 385).

The paradoxes that characterize women writers’ relationship with the word ‘author’ are highlighted by such criticism. Women who led blameless lives (in the ideological terms of the time) and whose writing combined moral rectitude with literary merit might be rewarded by being regarded as exceptional paragons. Indeed, literary merit in women was itself deemed to be a fusion of the first two qualities. Women whose lives were chaotic or

transgressed convention and those whose writing failed to observe the moral strictures laid upon them were, regardless of their work's popularity or economic success, likely to be considered either ridiculous or dangerous. Feminists with literary ambitions risked both accusations as William Hazlitt demonstrated when he wrote, 'I have an utter aversion to blue-stockings. I do not care a fig for any woman who knows what *an author* means' (quoted in Mellor, 1988: 106). Mary Collier's ingenuous manifesto quoted in the Introduction exposes the ideologically loaded nature of authorship for women. On the one hand, by taking up writing as a job like any other a woman could successfully put a 'small Sum of Money in her Pocket' and more pleasantly than selling milk door-to-door or making mantuas. The success of her enterprise depended on sales, patronage and subscriptions, which in turn relied on the popularity of her writing. On the other hand, the means by which she achieved that very popularity and success itself might be adjudged a symptom of authorial unworthiness and moral degeneracy. Mary Poovey highlights the dilemma late eighteenth-century women writers confronted in the notion of 'the proper lady', the ideal of feminine virtue in whom spirituality and selflessness combined to resist venality of any kind. She notes Catherine Maria Sedgwick's comment in her diary that her 'author existence' was 'accidental, extraneous & independent of my inner self' as evidence of the constraints under which women approached the question of authorship (Poovey, 1984: 40). Writers whose work spanned the turn of the century like Mary Shelley, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen found that increasingly they were called upon to justify the mismatch between authorship and female propriety. Poovey argues that for 'the young Mary Shelley, the collision between what we now call the "Romantic" model of originality and the "Victorian" model of feminine domesticity was particularly dramatic' (Poovey, 1984: 116).

Shelley's Gothic novel *Frankenstein* was published anonymously in 1818. It was received unfavourably by critics who saw in it immorality and political radicalism.<sup>1</sup> However, it caught the public imagination to such an extent that in 1823 a dramatized version was successfully staged in London. In the revised edition published in 1831, Shelley reluctantly claimed her authorship of 'so very hideous an idea' in her 'Author's Introduction'. In a sentence powerfully reminiscent of Sedgwick's diary revelation of an 'author existence' outside her 'inner self', Shelley wrote:

It is true that I am very averse to bringing myself forward in print; but as my account will only appear as an appendage to a former production, and as it be confined to such topics as have connexion with my authorship alone, I can scarcely accuse myself of personal intrusion ( Shelley, 1994: 5).

So difficult was it for her to reconcile her public author existence with her personal identity that Shelley concluded with an extraordinary disclaimer: 'I certainly did not owe the suggestion of one incident, nor scarcely of one train of feeling, to my husband, and yet ... As far as I can recollect, it was entirely written by him' (Shelley, 1994: 10). Despite this diffidence, Fred Botting notes that the Introduction 'offers an authorial and critical overview of the novel and furnishes it with another narrative'(Botting, 1995:4). In other words, Shelley reinscribes her authorial presence even while denying it. Margaret Homans argues that with this Introduction, Shelley 'removes herself beyond reproach for "putting [her]self forward", by formulating her critique as a devout inscription, a "passive reflection", a "version" that "resembles"'. Instead, she 'inserts this authorial role into her novel in the form of the fictive ... Margaret Saville, to whom [Walton's] letters are sent and who silently records and transmits them to the reader (Homans, 1995: 158).

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, review in *Edinburgh (Scot's) Magazine* (Second Series), 2 (March 1818), pp. 249-53.

Elizabeth Fay identifies the dichotomy between public authorial self and private domestic self as common to 'the home politics of the Gothic' critiqued in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) which, Fay proposes, 'attacks the very women who promote the idea of the sensibility-laden heroine who must act on intuition and emotion rather than logic: the women writers who provide and women readers who demand this type of fiction' (Fay, 1998: 109). Since Fay argues that the target of Gothic is patriarchal society, such an attack 'helps us see how the Gothic's structure makes it difficult for the woman writer interested in Romantic critique to pursue critique clearly and without complicity' (Fay, 1998:110). The Gothic novel's focus on a heroine, and its representation of supernatural terrors, Fay suggests, far from gulling women into neglecting reality 'forces us to recognize that transgression does indeed exist ... on home ground' (Fay, 1998: 109).

Sexual politics in the home has two fundamental impulses. One is external, and drives inward to intrude on the privacy and supposed protection of domestic space; the other proceeds from the internal in the opposite direction, expanding the privacy of imaginative psychic space outward to fill and distort the dimensions of the home (Fay, 1998: 110).

Romanticism appeared to address some of the difficulties experienced by women writers in relation to authorship by focusing on the individuated private self as subject-writer and apparently privileging the feminine. In theory this development should have permitted women writers greater freedom to claim their authorial position and explore the private self, but in reality, Romanticism's identification of woman with Nature as intuitive, affective and sentimental created further confusions which Alan Richardson succinctly identifies: 'The Romantic tradition did not simply objectify women. It also subjected them, in a dual sense, portraying woman as subject in order to appropriate the feminine for male subjectivity' (Richardson, 1988: 22). The feminization of the Romantic writer was a device



which enabled the *male* writer to reinvent his relationship with creativity and reclaim literary, or more specifically poetic, authority. Christine Battersby puts this paradox in more forceful terms:

A male could be a fully sexual being and remain a creator. But for a woman, choosing to be a professional writer, painter or a sculptor was not just a matter of choosing a career (what one *does* with one's life), it was also a matter of choosing what to *be*: a woman or a sexual pervert (Battersby, 1994: 64).

But although Romanticism did not necessarily offer greater authorial freedoms to women and may have increased the rift that already existed between woman as writer and woman as subject, some of its ideas, including *radical questioning* or transgression, helped create spaces within which women writers could operate as imaginative individuated producers. Anne Lister's relationship to writing highlights the problematics of Romanticism and of authorship as a gendered construct. She was herself very attached to many of the ideas of Romanticism, including, for example, that of a unique indivisible self experienced through the creative imagination. I return in the following section to the question of how Lister dealt with the difficulties for women in developing a subjective self and positioning that self in relation to ideas of authorship raised here.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century and as the nineteenth century progressed literary ambition was seen increasingly as *un-womanly* and subversive. The desire to be named and recognized by the male literary establishment conflicted with the demands of domesticity, forcing women to attempt to appropriate cultural space that was now reserved for men. Women's claims to full recognition within the canon could never be met for its status would be diminished by their participation. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar attribute the ability of 'contemporary women' to 'attempt the pen with energy and authority' to 'their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century foremothers [who] struggled in

isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity that felt like paralysis to overcome the anxiety of authorship that was endemic to their literary subculture'. This 'female anxiety of authorship', they suggest, is 'profoundly debilitating' to women, for it is handed down 'not from one woman to another but from the stern literary "fathers" of patriarchy to all their "inferiorized" female descendants' (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 51).<sup>2</sup>

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, then, when Anne Lister first embarked on her diary, women were encountering difficulties in situating themselves and their writing within the literary establishment which, like other high status remunerative professions, as financial rewards increased (to a great extent, as a result of improved distribution and printing facilities), and its status was raised, excluded women from its ranks. Charlotte Brontë described in her 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell' to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights* how 'we had very early cherished the dream of one day becoming authors' (Brontë, 1993: xl). In order to get their work accepted for publication, the Brontë sisters felt it necessary to choose pen-names of ambiguous gender: 'we did not like to declare ourselves women,' Charlotte Brontë wrote, 'because - without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called "feminine" - we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice' (Brontë, 1993: xl). Her suspicions were confirmed when she received a now notorious letter from Robert Southey to whom she had written requesting advice: 'Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life: and it ought not be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it' (Smith, 1995: 166-7). Her first publication, a

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<sup>2</sup> Gilbert and Gubar offer an alternative version of the 'anxiety of influence' postulated by Harold Bloom as the dynamic driving literary development. Bloom posits the son's fear of the procreative force of the father as the paradigm for the sequential historical relationship between literary artists; Gilbert and Gubar propose that the female writer's primary fear is that she cannot create because she has no antecedents (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 51).

joint volume of poems with her sisters, appeared under the pen-names, Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. Paradoxically, despite their ambitions, the Brontës, like other pseudonymous writers, could not openly claim to be authors.

It has been argued that middle-class women's increasing confinement within domestic roles during the nineteenth century gave them a new power base that enabled them to formulate demands based on their moral superiority in the home; that feminism drew strength from the ideology it opposed.<sup>3</sup> It does seem that Charlotte Brontë's ambition for authorship arose, in part at least, from the slippage between the two apparently conflicting ideologies of domesticity and feminism. The need to earn a living was complemented by Brontë's desire to locate a place for herself in middle-class society which her position as the unmarried daughter of a country curate could not offer. Her ambition was both literary and social, and it would appear that instead of working against each other, these two threads were usefully entwined. Brontë's interest in phrenology<sup>4</sup> fuelled her belief in the power of people to determine their own lives by self-improvement and self-control. If self-improvement could be achieved by vigorous self-control, and social progress through self-improvement, then novel-writing, when perceived to be the literary currency of the time, could provide the means of attaining financial, social, literary, class and political goals all at the same time. Lister too, despite her attachment to less flexible eighteenth-century ideas of rank, clearly believed in her ability to use literature as a means of reinforcing her social position, albeit in a different manner from Brontë.

Like many of her writing contemporaries, Lister understood that a training in the classics was the *sine qua non* of an author's qualifications. Helen Cooper, in her study of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's work, places the anxiety of women poets to acquire a classical

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<sup>3</sup> Rod Edmond, *Affairs of the Hearth: Victorian Poetry and Domesticity* (London: Routledge, 1988: 25-6).

<sup>4</sup> The study of the cranium to indicate a person's mental faculties, popular in early and mid-nineteenth-century Britain.

education alongside ‘anxieties of authorship’ (Cooper, 1988: 6). The elevated status accorded to those trained in the classics led women into various convolutions to obtain such a training. Emily Brontë painstakingly translated Virgil and Horace from books borrowed from her brother, while Barrett Browning (1806-61) obtained her father’s reluctant permission to study with her brother’s tutor, later befriendng a Greek scholar and acting as his amanuensis in return for tuition in Greek grammar (Chitham, 1996: 233-6). She mocked the usually amateurish nature of women’s classical education in *Aurora Leigh* with an ironic reference to ‘lady’s Greek/Without the accents’ (2:76-77) (Barrett Browning, 1978: 76). This earnest educational strategy could exacerbate rather than surmount the problem of women’s exclusion from the literary establishment. *Over-*educated women were, like the reviled blue-stockings, considered to have forsaken or, as Battersby has observed, *perverted* their sex, a position summed up by Barrett Browning in a letter to her friend Mary Russell Mitford: ‘it is a hard and difficult process for a woman to get forgiven for her strength by her grace ... Sometimes there is too much strength in proportion to the grace - then, o miserable woman!’ (Berridge, ed., 1974: 19).

There was an existing tradition of learned women being regarded as unwomanly. An eighteenth-century tract, *Characterism, or The Modern Age Display’d: being an Attempt to expose the pretended Virtues of both Sexes; with a Poetical Essay on Each Character* (1750) even suggested that the ‘Female Pedant’ was ‘by her much reading’ likely to turn into ‘that prodigious uncouth kind of Hermaphrodite, a deeply-read Lady’ (quoted in Nussbaum, 1989: 151), an interesting conflation of physical and intellectual transgression. Lister, in conventional mode, ‘spoke against a classical education for ladies in general’ but added that ‘it did no good if not pursued’ (Whitbread, 1992: 20). She herself was a lifelong autodidact, and as I show in the following chapter, she went to great lengths to acquire not simply a grounding in the classics, but a thorough knowledge of classical texts. She

appears to have regarded the danger of being designated unfeminine, because over-educated, lightly, and welcomed the label 'blue-stocking': 'Someone who did not know me said to Mrs John Raper of me, "One must not speak to her. She is a blue-stocking." "I don't know," replied Mrs Raper, "but she is very agreeable"' (Whitbread, 1988: 119). This piece of self-reporting has a complex structure. Lister implies that although being considered a blue-stocking has a certain cachet to it, it is her 'agreeable' personality that lends the term interest rather than a general approval of such women. She thus emphasizes her own singularity without challenging the wider ideological assumptions behind the label. This is rather typical of the way she deals with the conflicts that arise for her as a woman writer.

### Anne Lister and authorship

Helena Whitbread's first edition of transcripts from Lister's diary has the title *I Know My Own Heart*. This is taken from a diary entry for 20 August 1823 in which Lister quotes from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1781): 'Je sens mon coeur et je connais les hommes. Je ne suis fait comme aucun de ceux j'ai vus; je crois n'être fait comme aucun de ceux qui existent.' [I know my own heart and understand my fellow man. But I am unlike anyone I have ever met. I dare to say that I am like no one in the whole world] (Whitbread 1988: x). This quotation is set within Lister's discussion of the problems of love, specifically those that exist between herself and her now-married lover, Marianna Belcombe. It has usually and reasonably been understood to be a declaration of her sexual identity and its attendant difficulties,<sup>5</sup> and Lister's repetition of the phrase 'Je sens mon

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Whitbread quotes this passage in concert with the remark that Lister 'had come to terms ... with her own sexuality' (Whitbread, 1988: x).

coeur' later in the diary entry suggests that love is indeed her main focus of interest (Whitbread 1988: 283). Yet these opening words to Rousseau's autobiographical writings also proclaim the ideals of Romanticism: deep emotion, individualism, imagination and originality. Although not quoted by Lister, the words that immediately follow Rousseau's declaration are equally telling: 'If I am not better, at least I am different' (Rousseau, 1996: 3). The notion of difference and originality as a desirable commodity recurs throughout Lister's diary. On several occasions she reports friends and neighbours describing her as 'an original' and seems to relish the description.<sup>6</sup> She greatly admired Rousseau's *Confessions* and describes 'reading aloud to myself from p.42 to 50 (*very carefully*) ... I read this work so attentively for the style's sake. Besides this, it is a singularly unique display of character ...' (Whitbread, 1992: 103). Lister's identification with the work's uniqueness and singularity highlights both its underlying principles and its attraction for her. She recounts in her diary how she took her 'maxim from Rousseau's *Confessions*, "Une mortel ne paut offenser mon ame" [a mere mortal cannot offend my soul].' On the occasion described in this entry her maxim helped smooth over the difficulties of being sneered at by the proprietors of the hotel she and Belcombe were staying in who, she conjectured, 'perhaps ... did not like the cut of our establishment' (Whitbread, 1992 : 132). It also signalled an attachment to Romantic ideas: a sense of separateness from mundane concerns and a singularity of intellect and spirit which rendered her superior to, though misunderstood by, the common herd.<sup>7</sup> Lister's admiration for Rousseau potentially provided a rationale for her autobiographical writings: the exploration and extension of a unique individual identity through imaginative self-examination and the development of

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Lister wrote in her diary "7 November, 1806, 'Went to Mr Staffords concert in a Habit Skirt & was much quizzed as an original - care despised on my part' (SH:ML/E/26).

<sup>7</sup> Anna Clark suggests that Lister also admired Byron, 'another key Romantic figure', and that while she 'publicly denounced' him, 'in private she loved his verses' and gave her lover, Miss Browne, a copy of his poem 'Cornelian' as 'a veiled token of her feelings' (Clark, 1996: 37-8).

her writing talent. But as Clark points out, while Rousseau's writings supported the idea of the unique self, that self was 'highly gendered' and 'based in the masculine or feminine body' (Clark, 1998: 40).

Lister did not slavishly emulate Rousseau, however. The tone she adopts in her diary is more intensely intimate than 'the special tone of sentiment, affective and emotional without seeming private' which Marilyn Butler ascribes to Rousseau and which implies that the confessions ultimately 'might be anyone's, mankind's rather than Jean-Jacques'' (Butler, 1981: 30). Such a universality has almost always excluded women both from its reception and production, as has the notion of the unique creative self. Battersby convincingly demonstrates that the roots of the term *genius* were misogynistic and that these were assimilated and transmuted by Romanticism without difficulty (Battersby, 1994: 40). Nevertheless women of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were fired by its imaginative possibilities and aspired to it. As Battersby shows, women writers like Mary Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft and Madame de Staël embraced genius as an ideal but experienced it as an exclusion and an oppression (Battersby, 1994: 51, 133, 142), tied as it inevitably was for women to the notion of service in a greater (patriarchal) cause.

The aspiration or dream of artistic genius nevertheless persisted, for these writers and for Lister, who fantasized of achieving greatness through literature: 'Thinking as I dressed of the Literary & philosophical society just established at Halifax. I have thought of it repeatedly since hearing of it - *building castles in the air about the part I myself may take in furthering it* -' (Liddington, 1998: 45). Her declaration of an 'ambition in the literary way, of my wish for a name in the world' in her 1819 diary is clarified by later entries (Whitbread, 1988: 82). In 1821, she wrote: 'The idea of publishing at some time or other has often come across me & I have mused on what subject to fix; ... one might give a few useful essays on these matters, such for instance, as politics, religion, etc., & each essay

containing a sort of digest of its subject'(Whitbread, 1988: 168). By December 1822, she had spotted a gap in the market: 'Isabella asked me, on Saturday, the price of a translation of Pliny's *Natural History* & Plato's works. Musing on this as I walked along. Thought I would fit myself to translate Pliny ...' (Whitbread, 1988: 231-2). She continued to contemplate the idea and nine years later thought she would 'go to Italy and write something with reference to the classics - not to look at a book on the subject till I have written my own' (Liddington, 1998: 23). In 1833 she was still '*castle-building about writing, publishing, and making my book pay my expenses*' (quoted in Brothers, 1996: 119).

The daily experience of diary- and letter-writing seemed, however, to be separated in Lister's mind from the idea of authorship. Like Charlotte Brontë, she did not ascribe literary value to her private unpublished writings, although she clearly regarded them as useful and important in other ways: 'Come what may,' she wrote, 'writing my journals - thus, as it were, throwing my mind on paper - always does me good' (Whitbread, 1988: 201). An entry for November 1823 even suggests that she was beginning a reappraisal of the value of the private diary, though one based on its entertainment, and perhaps moral, properties, for, at the time, she was 'particularly pleased' with a conduct book she had been reading called *The Art of Employing Time*: 'There are several hints for journal-keeping on which I shall think seriously. There is something highly novel in this work altogether, & withal, interesting' (Whitbread, 1988: 315). This concern for the appropriate use of time echoes the epigraph to her diary for March 1817, a quotation from the introduction to Gibbon's *Journal*: 'I propose from this day to keep an exact journal of my actions and studies, both to assist my memory & to accustom me to set a due value on my time' (SH:7/ML/E/1). At the turn of the eighteenth century idleness was deplored particularly in women, who might otherwise fall into vicious thoughts and habits. The days



of the daughters of the gentry and middle classes were filled with apparently pointless activities aimed at keeping them from more dangerous pursuits. A popular advice book of 1801 exhorted young women to do ‘needle-work, knitting, and such like ... not on account of the intrinsic value of all you can do with your hands, which is trifling, but to enable you to ... fill up, in a tolerably agreeable way, some of the solitary hours you must necessarily pass at home’ (Gregory, 1801: 46).

Such an approach reinforced the prejudice against women’s ability to think originally. Throughout her life Lister spent many hours each day in autodidactic study and in writing. She generally spurned all but the most functional of those activities recommended to women (she could if necessary sew buttons on her waistcoat). Her intention was to extend her intellectual and artistic skills and the possibilities of individual understanding and self-exploration. But in this she would only have confirmed the evaluation of educated women offered by her hero, Rousseau. In his *Letter to Mr d’Alembert* (1758), he wrote:

Women, in general, possess no artistic sensibility ... nor genius. They can acquire a knowledge ... of anything through hard work. But the celestial fire that emblazens and ignites the soul, the inspiration that consumes and devours ... these sublime ecstasies that reside in the depths of the heart are always lacking in women’s writing (quoted in Battersby, 1994: 50).

Lister’s ambitions as an author then were played out against a backdrop more stifling and oppressive perhaps than those of eighteenth-century women like Mary Collier or Hannah More (1745-1833) for whom writing was among other things a source of income and employment. Romanticism encouraged the idea of individual freedom and the primacy of the creative genius. The value of attributes like passion, spontaneity and naïveté formerly regarded as *feminine* were re-colonized as the preserve of men so that, in a sense, the male artist could more properly be described as feminine than the woman, or at least,

women's femininity became a sub-form of that of men, debased and non-productive. How, then, was it possible for Lister to position herself as subject-writer?

I have suggested that despite all its repressive connotations for the female artist, Romanticism offered some routes for the woman as writer-subject to take. The idea of radical questioning or transgression allowed the possibility of reinscribing the writing self within different traditions. As I argue in Chapter 2, Lister's reading quickly led her to the discovery of homoerotic literature. The vast majority of this was produced by men about men but Lister appears to have had little difficulty in identifying with it and developing a theoretical position as a woman in relation to it. Indeed, it is frequently through reference to the literature and history of male homoeroticism that she interprets, analyses and theorizes her own position. An encoded diary entry of 13 November 1816 provides a useful example of how she reconciled apparently contradictory positions:

[Anne Belcombe]<sup>8</sup> *asked if I thought the thing [homosexuality] wrong & if it was forbidden in the Bible ... I dexterously parried all these points said ... that [male homosexuality] was positively forbidden & signally punished in the Bible that the other [female homosexuality] was certainly not named ... & it was infamous to be connected with both sexes but that were [sic] beings who were so unfortunate as to be not quite so perfect ... (SH:7/ML/E).*

Here Lister reinscribes the silence surrounding female homosexuality not as a negative exclusion but as a positive privilege, a distinction that separates it from male homosexuality and bisexuality. She argues, however, that bisexuality is an aberration rather than an avoidable evil. The passage offers an oblique challenge to Rousseau's theory of the natural complementarity of masculinity and femininity, a sophisticated analysis of the relativity of transgression in regard to different sexualities, and a convenient defence of

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<sup>8</sup> Lister's lover and Marianna's sister.

Lister's own sexual and emotional allegiances to her own sex. These she identified early in life:

*I had always had the same turn from infancy [...] as it had been made known to me as it were by intuition that I had never varied & no effort on my part had been able to counter it that the girls liked me & had always liked me*  
(SH:7/ML/E, 13 November 1816).

Lister appears also, contrary to the traditional values of her class, to have embraced the idea of the justice of female inheritance, recounting in her diary her supposition that her uncle would bequeath the Shibden estate to her over the claims of male heirs such as her own father:

*after tea we had a long talk about family affairs I advised my uncle to entail Shibden .... my fathers having once said ... he would leave Marian & me joint to which I objected as it might lead to the place being sold my uncle agreed seemed annoyed & from what I could guess meant me to have it* (SH:7/ML/E, October 1816)

So although she saw herself as in many ways supporting the conservative conformist traditions of the minor gentry, the positions Lister adopted in relation to sexuality and female inheritance worked together to construct a self that in social, economic and emotional terms could, if necessary, operate outside the parameters of social convention. She did not embrace the strictures of early nineteenth-century codes of femininity for herself, even if she expected them to be observed by her lovers and by other women of her rank.<sup>9</sup> In diary accounts of her adventures she frequently assumes a masculine mode, which, in combination with her description of her customary costume of black riding-habit

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<sup>9</sup> In Chapters 4 and 5 I explore in greater detail the development of Lister's social ambitions alongside her identification of her sexuality. Her conservatism in observing gendered social mores and expecting them to be observed conveniently allowed a few exceptions, one of whom was Miss Pickford, whom she described as 'blue and masculine' (Whitbread 1988: 234) and another herself (see also Chapter 2).

and her manly deportment, is suggestive of a characteristic identified by Sidonie Smith as 'cross-dressing narratively' (Smith, 1987: 118). Smith's remarks are made in the context of Charlotte Charke's autobiographical novel, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke* (1775), which describes Charke's adventures as a strolling player, during which she dressed, and passed, as a man. Lister by no means attempted to pass as a man, but Smith's observation that 'cross-dressing speaks to female desire for authority, adventure, power and mobility, the accoutrements of male selfhood' offers a useful commentary on the gendering of Lister's self-constructive writings (Smith, 1987: 112). On occasions when she was not made welcome in society, she guessed this to be attributable to her 'masculine' appearance and by implication, her sexuality (Whitbread, 1988: 294-5). The remedy she proposed to herself was not the modification of her masculine attributes and the subsequent further concealment of her sexual identity, but the 'acquiring of more importance ... [in order to] do with impunity what I could not do now' (Whitbread, 1988: 298). The idea of the gendering of her self-narrative is, then, closely allied to the acquisition of rank in Lister's diary.

As writer-subject she often adopts a position which neatly aligns her literary self with Romantic notions of masculinity. A diary entry of October 1824 tells how she produced a pleasing if fantastic account of herself as an English gentleman to an admiring female audience at a Paris pension: 'I rattled away to Mme de Boyve. I admired her. Should have been in love with her if I had been a man, but would not have married her. Would only have married an Englishwoman. ... I should be head of my family & it should remain English still' (Whitbread, 1992: 39-40). With a curious side-step Lister avoided confronting the choice for women writers posited by Battersby, whether to be 'a woman or a sexual pervert' (Battersby, 1994: 64), for by her own rationale she disclosed that she had *no choice* in the matter.

Battersby specifically refers here to the professional woman writer. Lister considered the possibility of earning money from writing, for she was always on the look-out for financial propositions to boost her income. But she never followed this through, perhaps because, as the above quotations from her diary suggest, she was undecided about the genre she would choose. She valued the essay and the scholarly treatise but professed to disapprove of that most marketable literary product, the novel, reporting in a diary entry of 1823 a conversation with her women friends, and lovers, in which they all ‘agreed that Lady Caroline Lamb’s novel *Glenarvon* is very talented but a very dangerous sort of book’ (Whitbread, 1988: 296), and in a later entry cautioning herself not to indulge in ‘the fearful rousing, of novel reading’ (Whitbread, 1988: 146).

On one occasion she had an idea for a more daring venture: she thought she ‘would write an account of my acquaintance with M[arianna Belcombe] surely in a series of letters’ (Whitbread, 1988: 232). The contemplation of a collection of letters recounting her acquaintance with Belcombe was somewhat risqué, though it must be assumed that she did not propose to reveal the true nature of their friendship. The little volume of letters was considered an admirable attainment in Lister’s gentrified world. It frequently had a moral and didactic purpose as in, for example, the posthumous publication in 1801 of Dr Gregory’s ‘Letters ... written by a tender father ... for the instruction of his daughters’ (Gregory, 1801: A2). Fictional letters appearing in epistolary novels were less respectable. Lister even settled on a pseudonym for her proposed publication, one which, like the Brontës’ pen-names, Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, would hint at a male identity while remaining ambiguously gendered: ‘Think of calling myself, “Constant Durer”, from the verb *dure*, to endure’ (Whitbread, 1988: 231-2). The invention of a pen-name is an oddly contradictory proceeding for a woman who professed to want ‘a name in the world’ (Whitbread, 1988: 82). Like the Brontë sisters, Lister would, if published, have had a

name, but it would not have been the one the world knew her by (and which she treasured as indicative of an ancient pedigree). She would thus have been able to disclaim any failures but would also have had to waive success.<sup>10</sup>

Lister's caution in approaching publication reveals the extent of the difficulties that existed for professional women writers who risked not only the charge of the abrogation of proper feminine behaviour and of sexual perversion, but concomitantly the loss of social class. She often reiterated her desire to become an author, was capable of writing several thousand words every day and certainly later in life had the capacity to sustain some financial loss.<sup>11</sup> Like Barrett Browning she was an earnest autodidact, studying many hours each day regardless of other commitments. She craved 'greatness', had ample material for many publications and yet still hesitated, possibly because she was not prepared to risk unsympathetic public scrutiny. Residence and eventually ownership of Shibden Hall was Lister's foothold into the socially elevated world of the greater landowners and minor aristocracy. The Shibden household operated according to a gendered distribution of responsibility skewed in favour of Lister's masculine self-construction. Wearing a man's greatcoat and boots, she supervised the farm, estate and industrial concerns while her aunt organised the domestic, a task that later fell to her lover and companion, Anne Walker. This procedure was to a certain extent sanctioned by the localized prevalence of independent women landowners and a plea of eccentricity, a position which as I have shown, suited Lister's predilection for the Romantic. All these curious or unconventional activities could be rationalised by reference to exceptional conditions. They did not

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<sup>10</sup> Charlotte Brontë eventually found the discomfort of disguise too great. She longed to be acknowledged as author, and she and her sister Anne declared the Bells' true identity to their publisher. Emily Brontë, on the other hand, was horrified at her sisters' betrayal of her identity and Charlotte was forced to write a retraction of this part of their declaration (Barker, 1994: 563).

<sup>11</sup> Charlotte Brontë, on receiving an offer from a publisher for *Jane Eyre*, replied, 'One hundred pounds is a small sum for a year's intellectual labour, nor would circumstances justify me in devoting my time and attention to literary pursuits with so narrow a prospect of advantage' (Barker, 1994: 527).

constitute a feminist or radical declaration. Authorship via publication could, however, have engaged Lister in a confrontation with the literary establishment which had the potential to damage her social ambitions. It could also perhaps have injured her emotional relationships. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's successful negotiation of the difficult path between a financially rewarding career as author and the demands of femininity (she boasted that she never even *ordered* dinner in her life, let alone prepared it) required her to disguise and dissimulate her own intellectual abilities and belittle those of other women. It is not surprising then that when Lister contemplated writing a book about her friendship with Marianna Belcombe she quickly invented a pen-name that would have disguised her identity from critics and friends alike. Such a strategy would also have reflected both her visual self-presentation and her experiments in her diary with an ambiguously, even 'cross-dressed', narrative.

### Women diarists and authorship

Lister's diary production had many antecedents and possible models; diary-writing was widely practised by and acknowledged as a literary form appropriate for women from at least the seventeenth century. The earliest examples were often produced for moral self-improvement like, for example, the devotional diaries of the Puritans. Margaret Hoby writing on 1 April 1605, declares:

At Night I thought to writt my daies Iournee as before, becaus, in the readinge over some of my former spent time, I funde some profitt might be made of that Coursen from which, thorow too much neccligence, I had a Longe time dissisted (quoted in Blodgett, 1989: 76).

By the eighteenth century, diaries had been secularized, though the habit of using them for contemplating past mistakes was still common. Ladies' bound pocket diaries could be purchased in which to record brief details of engagements, visitors and other matters, which could later be used as aides-mémoires to writing up a fuller journal. The pocket memorandum book which recorded the minutiae of daily housekeeping also habituated eighteenth-century women to regular and detailed record-keeping. Amanda Vickery describes them as 'the tool of the literate and the lasting record of the "business" that tied the genteel housekeeper to her writing desk every morning' (Vickery, 1998: 133). For example, in her manual on household economy, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1778), Mrs Esther Chapone advises the new young housewife to 'enter in a book a memorandum of every new piece of intelligence you acquire. You may afterwards compare these with more mature observations, and you can make additions and corrections as you see occasion' (Chapone, 1778: 50).

In her study of Englishwomen's diaries, *Centuries of Female Days*, Harriet Blodgett argues that by the mid-eighteenth century a literary tradition of women's diaries was well-established, employing styles learned from earlier diarists (or older female relatives), or, as the century progressed, from examples of diary-keeping in other literary forms, plays, novels, collections of letters. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the practice was considered to be an important part of a lady's education and published editions of women's (and men's) diaries, such as Fanny Burney's, popularized the form. By the late nineteenth century diary-keeping was viewed as an essential part of a middle-class woman's daily routine and the diary as 'a kind of second conscience' (quoted in Blodgett, 1989: 38), with Queen Victoria herself setting the example. However, Vickery locates the shift in approach, emphasis and style in women's diary-writing as beginning in the eighteenth century: 'The pious soul-searching that inspired most seventeenth-century



diarists is a distinctly muted theme in many eighteenth-century women's journals, leaving the page clear for sheer writerly virtuosity' (Vickery, 1998: 287).

Many diarists combine several of the functions outlined above in their diary-keeping, but Lister appears to have embraced them all. As well as focusing on relationships, human behaviour and attitudes (characteristic interests of women diarists), she is equally concerned with her own education, achievements, and ambitions. Her self-preoccupation has led Liz Stanley to describe her as an 'ego-focussed' autobiographer, in the mould of male writers like Augustine and Rousseau, whose autobiographies are fuelled by the drive for ego-fulfilment.

If, like Charlotte Brontë, Lister separated unpublished from published writing in her ideas of authorship, she may have regarded her own diary as serving a purpose similar to that of the ladies' pocket-book: as an aide-mémoire, a system of household accounting, a taxonomy of events or experiences, solely for her own use. Yet, Lister may also have had an objective beyond these functions, for the frank self-narrative she offers in her diary appears to anticipate a readership. Derek Matravers observes in his introduction to the *Confessions* that Rousseau, whom Lister so admired, 'desires to be transparent to his readers ... [for] he believes that we will be in a position to judge him only if we know him in detail'. *The Confessions* 'may be seen as an attempt ... to establish a friendship with the readership he hoped for after death' (Rousseau, 1996: vi). In her discussion of Alice James's private diary, Linda Anderson remarks on the difficulty of ascribing author-intention to the unpublished diarist: 'the private status of the diary ... leaves it unclear whether by naming herself in writing [James] was also seeking a name for herself as a writer' (Anderson, 1997: 15), but notes that James 'may have had, as she was writing [the diary], half an eye on her posthumous reputation' (Anderson, 1997: 12).<sup>12</sup> According to

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<sup>12</sup> Alice James (1849-92), sister of Henry and William, kept a diary from 1889 until her death.

Helena Whitbread, Lister too hoped her diary would be read, and possibly published, fifty years after her death.<sup>13</sup> She may therefore perhaps have been conscious of what Anderson describes as writing ‘towards a future we do not know but which may eventually know us differently’ (Anderson, 1997: 14).

Judy Simons (whose primary focus is the diaries of literary women) addresses the question of diarists’ literary intentions when she proposes that ‘the diary is not merely a daily record of events, but a continuous narrative, and as such a highly self-conscious piece of writing’. She cautions against the ‘idea of the innocent narrator’ and warns that women who were engaged in the craft of writing as a profession’ were ‘in touch with a theoretical scheme of literary practice’. The private journals of these women, Simons suggests, were ‘subject to unspoken disciplines and generic conventions such as governed the poetry and prose produced by the same writers for the public market’ (Simons, 1990: 203). While Lister cannot be regarded (and did not regard herself) as a professional writer in a conventional sense, her literary ambitions and her consciousness of literary values, as well as her writing practice, may equally have led her to assimilate market place disciplines and conventions into her diary-writing and into the construction of her self-narrative.

Blodgett makes a strong case for diaries to be recognized as one of the primary literary productions characteristic of women. Their exclusion from ‘the critically honored canon’ that has normalized what Judith Sloman calls ‘the work designed as a completed whole and readily detached from the author’s personal life and motives in writing it’, has, Blodgett claims, discriminated ‘against most of what women have written over the centuries’ (quoted in Blodgett, 1989: 7). But, she argues, diaries are

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<sup>13</sup> Whitbread’s remarks were made during her presentation at the conference, *Coming Out? Examining the Anne Lister Evidence*, at the University of Leeds, 14 November 1998.

forms of aesthetic representation through language rather than ... merely factual data. They are literature subjectively interpreting life ... [and] like other forms of literature ... they are potentially subject to influence from models and other devices of rhetoric. ... A diary is an act of language that, by speaking of one's self, sustains one's sense of being a self, with an autonomous and significant identity' (Blodgett, 1989: 5).

A study of Lister's writing practice reveals a process of production of a self-narrative which must have had a profound effect on the conduct of Lister's daily life. A writer who knows she is going to write about an event or an idea thinks about and plans her piece of writing before sitting down to the physical production so that the production of the written piece permeates her day. Again, as she looks for something to write about, she frames, constructs, interprets and thus even experiences life through a literary lens (rather as carrying a camera on holiday shapes visual experience, which begins to project forward into the narrative of the next good shot). Charles Taylor has described this self-narrating process in *Sources of the Self*: 'the life at any moment is the causal consequence of what has transpired earlier ... [and] since the life to be lived has also to be *told*, its meaning is seen as something that unfolds through the events (Taylor, 1989: 289). Lister's own writing practice was so dominant in her daily life that, without examining the content of the diary, it is possible to see the process alone as producing self-constructive meaning, 'what is in the act of becoming in the course of writing', as Deena Metzger and Barbara Meyerhoff describe diary-writing (quoted in Blodgett, 1989: 39).

However, Blodgett's research into women's private diaries between 1599 and 1941 has led her to the conclusion that women 'rather than putting their diaries to work for self-construction, ... have employ[ed] them instead for self-condemnation and, however inadvertently, confessions of low self-esteem'. Women, she says, write 'against a

background of centuries of female disparagement', and 'most of the women [she has studied] are conventional in their assumptions about womanhood' (Blodgett, 1989: 4). Simons offers a more positive gloss on the same theme: 'the private journal, which had gained credence as a genre because of its spiritual associations, became one of the few forms that women could adopt as less shameful than writing poetry or polemic, areas where they might appear to be competing with men and thus disowning their sex'. Simons argues that women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries used their diaries as 'indirect means of resistance to codes of behaviour with which they were uncomfortable, allowing for a release of feelings and opinions which had no other vent' and concludes that 'by the mid-eighteenth century, women's reliance on formulaic utterances in the private journal allowed them both to comply with the accepted conventions of published diaries and to find ways of circumventing those conventions to suggest a personal authority' (Simons, 1990: 3-4). Lister's diary reflects the latter category rather than the sorry state of affairs described by Blodgett, for it not only records a sense of self-satisfaction with the development of her life, but also, while in many respects maintaining a conservative stance, explores ways in which that life may be shaped and changed.<sup>14</sup> For example, in a diary entry on Thursday 22 April 1819, Anne Lister responds to gossip about her flirtation with a young Halifax woman, Maria Browne, reported to her by a friend, Ellen Empson:

Miss Browne they say is my shadow. I laughed & said I was amused. At any rate, the people knew nothing about me for I never went to their parties or mixed with them at all, & and I only hoped Ellen never enlightened them about me, giving her, at the same time, to understand that I thought myself of that importance that I might choose my own society, that I always consulted my own inclination &

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<sup>14</sup> Blodgett looks only at diarists whose work has been published. When Blodgett's book was first published in 1988, Lister's diaries were only available in brief extracts in local journals and transactions. However, it may be significant that very few diaries by lesbians *have* been published, a fact that does not necessarily indicate the scarcity of lesbian diarists.

comfort & should always feel at perfect liberty to walk with a chimney-sweep if I chose (Whitbread, 1988: 89).

Lister recounts this event with a mixture of arrogance, humour, self-possession and independence that characterizes much of her writing. She could have reported it in very different and negative terms. Her construction emphasizes her forthright no-nonsense manner of speaking and her straightforwardness in dealing with disapprobation. Nevertheless, it conveys two conflicting impressions: one of a woman who was so satisfied with her position and so self-confident that she cared little for what the world thought of her and was furthermore uninterested in matters of social class; the other of someone who is very anxious not to have her transgressions broadcast to the world, and who despised 'the people' and never went anywhere near them.<sup>15</sup> The way she has chosen to frame this discussion within her own reported speech lends weight to the forceful identity she favours and tends to diminish her doubts (though, interestingly, she does not disguise these completely).

Lister herself appeared to have an ambiguous attitude to her diary. The language she uses in describing the experience of producing it indicates the pressures and anxieties it relieved and the constant vigilance and self-management it required. 'I owe a good deal to this journal,' she wrote. 'By unburdening my mind on paper I feel, as it were, in some degree to get rid of it' (Whitbread, 1988:154). This curious expression, 'to get rid of' the mind, like 'unburden', seems to indicate a need to expel the accumulation of thoughts, feelings and information required by her taxonomic and observational procedures. Similar expressions recur throughout the diary: '... writing my journals - thus, as it were, throwing my mind on paper - always does me good' (Whitbread, 1988: 201); 'Writing my journal

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<sup>15</sup>Lister applies the derogatory term 'the people' to members of the local community engaged in trade. As a member of the minor gentry, she felt entitled to regard herself as of a higher rank.

has composed & done me good' (Whitbread, 1988: 283). The terms 'to get rid of', 'to unburden', and 'to throw the mind' and even, 'to do me good', strongly suggest the relief associated with physical purging. Indeed, Lister extends the metaphor to link an unsatisfactory mental purging with sickness of thought: 'In spite of all I have written in my journal, I have not unburdened my heart enough. I am still vapourish, still sick of thought' (Whitbread, 1988: 286). It is hard to avoid a comparison between the experience recorded here and Lister's regular and detailed record of her bowel movements, which is expressed in similar language: '*feeling somehow languid & feverish bowels always wrong no motion ever but few buttons*' (SH: 7/ML/E, 25 Nov. 1831). When she described herself as producing '*nothing but little round bits for the last five or six months*', her remedy was to take '2 full spoonfull of castor oil & no breakfast' which satisfyingly resulted in '*one good motion & ...3 since*' (Liddington, 1998: 154). The distress occasioned by Marianna Belcombe's marriage momentarily disturbed her writing routine, inducing a kind of mental constipation: 'I seem unable to return to the dry detail of a journal' (Whitbread, 1988: 283). Occasionally, the links she makes between literary activity and bowel health is startling. It is not clear from 'had a bit of soda water while reading aloud ... [which] did my bowels no good' whether she blames the soda, the reading aloud, or a combination of both for her ill health (SH: 7/ML/E, 25 Nov. 1831).

It is not only the metaphorical weight of the diary-archive in her head, but the regularity of the requirement to expel it on to paper, that is suggested by these images. The diary, like her bowel movements, must be produced at frequent, regimented intervals. Failure to do so, she seems to suggest, may result in damage to her mental or physical health. In this respect, at least, the diary served a clearly therapeutic purpose, although the emotional needs it fulfilled are closely linked to the idea of writing as a compulsion.

### Diary- and letter-writing among women of Anne Lister's circle

The practice of diary-writing and epistolary exchange was habitual in Lister's circle as it was among women's networks generally in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Amanda Vickery examines a sample of letters, diaries and accounts books of over a hundred eighteenth-century women of South Yorkshire and Lancashire in her study, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, and suggests that the practice of producing literary material was endemic among gentry women (Vickery, 1998: 11). West Riding women seem to have engaged in the production equally vigorously. In the immediate vicinity of Shibden were a number of women whose lives touched upon Lister's in only a minor fashion, but who kept diaries covering approximately the same period as her, including two women who, though older than Lister, both attended her Alma Mater, York Manor School. Caroline Walker's home, Walterclough Hall,<sup>16</sup> was a couple of miles away from Shibden and just over the hill was Elizabeth Wadsworth's fine seventeenth-century dwelling, Holdsworth House. Like Lister, they were descended from 'old Halifax families ... were staunch Church and Tory, and moved in the upper strata of local society. All three [Lister, Walker and Wadsworth] were ladies of independent means, responsible for the management of estates, and skilled in farming' (Trigg, 1943: 123). They each mention the others in their diaries (Gérin, 1978: 75).

Elizabeth Wadsworth's diary survives from 1817 to 1829. W.B. Trigg's article in the Halifax Antiquarian Society transactions describes her as being fifty-seven when she began

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<sup>16</sup> Winifred Gérin, among others, has made a convincing case for the Walker family to have been the origin of the story of *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë, who was briefly an assistant at Law Hill School, a short walk away from Shibden Hall (Gérin, 1978: 74-80).

writing it, but as it also designates Lister as beginning her diary at twenty-four (whereas she was fifteen), this may be inaccurate. Nevertheless, despite the difference in age, Wadsworth was certainly writing when Lister was established at Shibden Hall and both women record similar local events.<sup>17</sup> Wadsworth's diary supplies a record of daily activities, visits, purchases and news. It is a mixture of aide-mémoire, household accounts, souvenir and self-narrative. Its entries are often very brief, 'Jan. 15 [1821] - Bottled the gooseberry wine' (Trigg, 1944: 63), 'April 30. [1821] - Heard cuckoo' (Trigg, 1944: 65). Yet even such terse entries have required consideration and selection and although they may seem random, a sequential pattern gradually emerges. The cuckoo, for example, reappears on June 29th, 1822, 'Heard cuckoo sing possibly the last time' (Trigg, 1944: 71); the crocus is mentioned in the diary each February. Wadsworth's self-construction is generally confined to actions rather than ideas, 'Walked ... to the well' (Trigg, 1944: 72), 'signed my will' (Trigg, 1944: 73). When she does engage in interpretative self-narration Wadsworth adopts a similarly succinct style which conveys an impression of a direct and commanding personality who does not expect to be opposed. According to her diary, her sacking of the local schoolmaster was terse but forceful. The full entry reads: 'May 30 [1822] - Walked to the school and told Mr. Sharpe I would not permit writing in the school on Sundays, and perhaps he might hear of a better situation' (Trigg, 1944: 71). The explanation for her actions is clearly embedded in this entry and she saw no need to expand on it here. Such an imperious attitude is characteristic of the country gentry, of course, but perhaps Lister would have envied Wadsworth's ability to use language so economically to produce such powerful sense of self.

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<sup>17</sup> For example, both Lister and Wadsworth record the flight of a hot air balloon (Trigg, 1944: 80, Whitbread, 1988: 299).



Caroline Walker's diary style is by contrast almost florid: 'Sunday 6 April [1823] Lister's [not Anne] coming interrupted me beaucoup - the fear of catching cold prevented me from going to chapel I could not read as much as I wished, but I hope my reflections on the duties of the day will make me better for the future' (SH:3/AB/21/8). This diary falls broadly into the category of souvenir written for friends or family or for posterity, but, as this entry demonstrates, it also reminded Walker of her duties and helped her correct past mistakes. The entries are generally accounts of daily events, frequently followed by a pious reflection. The language she uses is often self-consciously literary or elevated, as in 'beaucoup' above, or in the entry describing the death of a relative: 'a long & most [serious] illness has at length terminated his existence' (SH:3/AB/21/8, 22 April 1823).

While Walker's diary may be only a little less sparse and economical than Wadsworth's, her 'Family History of the Walkers of Walterclough', written around 1804, allowed her more opportunity to develop a discursive literary style. Her account of her mother's choosing to send her to the Manor School, York, 'my mother ... determined to send me to York where she had been admitted herself, she used to say there was always gentility enough for me at York ...' (SH:3/AB/20: 125), is neatly deconstructed by her observations on her arrival there:

I parted from my brother & sister & accompanied by my mother went to the Manor ... we were surprised to see the girls have so common an appearance, to us they looked like twenty little maid servants dancing for they were dressed in printed calico gowns, stu[ff] petticoats, and muslin caps ... Miss [M]ab Duncombe of Duncombe Park was among them, my mother asked at my request that I might sleep with Miss Duncombe, Miss Hargrave said that she slept with a Miss Maude, but hoped that she would have no objection ... (SH:3/AB/20: 127).

Walker uses her writing to produce a sense of self within the acceptable confines of social class and family tradition while hinting at the possibility of resistance. She describes her father in his youth, for example, as ‘an extraordinary character although young, & handsome & educated ... yet he seemed contented to bury himself in a retreat’, adding the rider ‘& he acted as though he thought my mother ought to conform entirely to his ideas’ (SH:3/AB/20). She was related to Anne Walker who eventually became Lister’s life companion. As members of the rural gentry and as descendants of old families, she and Wadsworth would have commanded Lister’s respect even though she probably found them rather dull.

Another Halifax woman writing a diary during this period was Elizabeth Threlkeld (1774-1837), a linen draper with a shop in Southgate.<sup>18</sup> She was married to William Rawson who owned two small mills at Sowerby Bridge and Halifax<sup>19</sup> and mixed with the wealthier shopkeepers and small merchants despised by Lister (but amongst whom she was not too proud to look for lovers). Rawson would certainly have known of Lister’s flirtation with Maria Browne, the daughter of a Halifax businessman, for her diary, which like Wadsworth’s functions as an aide-mémoire and household record, reveals that she ‘had ... [the] Browns with Miss(es) Brown ... to tea’ on 5 January 1827 (Wilson, 1958: 45).<sup>20</sup> The number of women’s diaries of this period still in existence suggests that the practice of diary-keeping was well-established among the gentry and commercial networks of Halifax. The sophistication of their producers’ literary skills varied and, subsequently, their ability to construct themselves as complex literary subjects. Nevertheless, the interconnections between the diarists reinforces Vickery’s argument that their diaries played an important

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<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Threlkeld was Dorothy Wordsworth’s aunt. As a child, Wordsworth lived in Halifax with her aunt for nine, reportedly happy, years.

<sup>19</sup> After Elizabeth Threlkeld’s death, William Rawson married Mary Priestley, the cousin of Anne Walker, Lister’s eventual life-companion.

<sup>20</sup> Miss Patchett, the headmistress of Law Hill School which Emily Brontë was to teach at in 1839, was present on the same occasion.

part in negotiating social relationships, establishing values and constructing genteel networks (Vickery, 1998: 11).

Lister's acquaintance network was further extended by friends acquired during her York schooldays and after. In several cases, friendship had gone beyond casual social niceties and developed into more intimate, even sexual, relationships. Eliza Raine, a pupil at the Manor School, York, and Lister's lover, began her diary at the same time as Lister as a joint project which would reinforce and deepen their friendship. For a time, Lister pursued an affair with Isabella 'Tib' Norcliffe, a young woman from a wealthy county family. When Norcliffe introduced her to Marianna Belcombe, a York doctor's daughter, Lister fell passionately in love. Belcombe too kept a diary and both she and Raine were prolific letter writers. Raine and Belcombe exchanged letters with each other as well as with Lister and, although Tib Norcliffe was a sporadic letter-writer, she also corresponded with Lister and Belcombe. At one time or another, all four women, Lister, Norcliffe, Raine and Belcombe, were in correspondence with Miss Marsh of York. Marsh was a lifelong friend of Lister's (though never a lover, it seems) to whom she was introduced by Eliza Raine.<sup>21</sup>

Raine defined herself as a 'lady of colour' (SH:7/ML/A/31), and was the daughter of a surgeon in the East Indies. During her school years she lived out of term-time with her guardian, William Duffin, in fashionable Micklegate, York. Lister's 1805 list of pupils at Manor School shows that she and Raine slept in the same room, but in the slope of the roof, which was probably the worst position (SH:7/ML/13). The two girls developed an intense friendship which, after Lister left the school, was conducted mainly through their letters and diaries. One of Lister's earliest letters to Raine is addressed to 'My dearest Eliza' at Manor School, 1806. In it, Lister confesses that she 'sighs and laments' her

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<sup>21</sup> See Appendix 1, 'Who's Who in Anne Lister's Diary', and Appendix 2, 'Anne Lister Chronology', for further details of these relationships.

friend's absence ... fully verifying the old Proverb that the more you have the more you would have'. She concludes with a little couplet: 'I study much to stay my greif /And think on your letters for releif' (SH: 7/ML/A/1).<sup>22</sup>

Raine's diary for July 1809 to November 1810 has survived. It anxiously rehearses the terms of her relationship with Lister, as these entries for August 1810, when Raine visited Halifax, demonstrate:

Sunday 5 Dined at Ellen Royd

9 I dined at Mrs J. Lister's & heard an account of the amiable I[sabella]  
N[orcliffe] ...

14 Dear Lister & I had a reconciliation ...

16 ... *Lister & I had a difference which happily was made up before the  
conclusion of the day but left me e[x]ceedingly ill*

17 ... *my husband came to me & finally a happy reunion was  
accomplished* (Liddington, 1992: 20).

Her selection of experiences for inclusion in her diary, and her ordering it into a consistent narrative, tends to confirm Carolyn Steedman's argument that written self-narration frequently 'placates and subdues the writer' by 'draw[ing] into a chronology the inchoate items of a life'. Meaning is thus produced 'by the very act of sequencing it, in some kind of order, to some kind of end'(Steedman, 1996: 62). Raine's letters too indicate a desire to find a sequential pattern among events and experiences, particularly one which would reveal a development in her relationship with Lister. So, for example, she begins a letter of 2 August 1812, with a reminder of past joys and in anticipation of future delight:

This day, month, hour I first saw you judge that in such reflection how many  
past scenes of my life rise to swell the pleasures of memory! Yet I do not look

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<sup>22</sup>All the spelling in letters by Raine, Lister and Marsh is reproduced here as in the mss.

back to departed joys as if I had them not equally or in any degree now. In contrasting the past & the present, my judgement declares, the latter, to be more replete with solid happiness - & blessings seem greater than I have ever known them before - What says my Welly [Raine's pet-name for Lister]? For affection & our long friendship tell me that our fates are ever inseparable; & that in the detail of the one we include if not all of the other's - Eight years then I have been blessed with, & invariably happy in our friend[ship] - Time seems only to swell the tide of our affections & our joys (SH:7/ML/E).

The tone of this letter is touchingly florid. Raine dares Lister to be so cruel as to deny her assertions and co-opts her into accepting the vision she presents by the use of a pet-name. The letter's fluent yet controlled style and its polished production suggests that it was worked on carefully either in written or imagined draft. Raine and Lister exchanged letters very regularly, sometimes once or twice a day until their relationship began to decline in 1814. The regularity of this task creates an effect very like that of writing a daily diary; it seeps into the thoughts and conduct of the day, and might even begin to effect an order in them. A narrative is produced rather as it is in a diary, albeit one which is negotiated between two people.

The extract from Raine's letter above begins in the first person singular but rapidly proceeds to the plural 'we' and 'our', drawing its intended reader into complicity with the writer-subject, projecting the narrative forward into the reader's imagination. Raine's language and style here and in other letters is skilfully deployed, sophisticated and is able to express complex emotions and ideas, as this extract from a more sober letter of 21 March 1808, when Raine was seventeen, demonstrates:

I am glad to hear you say that you hope we shall again spend days as happy as those already spent I wish we may but Hope says no such thing to me do not

let this cast a gloom over your bright prospects perhaps I view our happiness through a concave mirror affection is not wanting on my part to make us most happy but something I know not what disturbs me (SH:7/ML/E).

The lack of punctuation indicates a letter written in haste, perhaps without a previous draft. Yet the language and the flow of ideas is that of a practised writer. Raine constantly employs imagery to express complex emotions and the phrase ‘I view our happiness through a concave mirror’ is rather threatening, suggesting a narrowed or distorted view of the reflected image.

Lister was not simply a participant in this exchange of letters but a collector and editor of them. Jill Liddington has shown that ‘the 1,850 letters which survive in the Shibden Hall Muniments boxes represent only a fraction of a much larger original number of Anne Lister’s letters’ (Liddington, 1992: 57). This collection includes not only letters addressed to Lister, but copies or drafts of letters she had sent out, or even of letters sent by other correspondents to her friends, which had come into her possession. A letter from Marianna Belcombe to Isabella Norcliffe of 1809 probably predates Lister’s meeting with Belcombe. It gives an early insight into Belcombe’s facility with the pen: ‘the weather is so uncommonly fine, that I think even you will allow, a “pedestrianic excursion on the sea beach shore” preferable to a waddle down Coney Street & back again.’ (SH: 7/ML/ 19). Lister also copied out parts of or whole letters into her diary and provided a commentary on them and was thus able to reinscribe and even redirect what may have at one point appeared to be a jointly constructed narrative.

A useful example of how this narrative began as a shared production may be found in Marianna Belcombe’s annual New Year letters to Lister. Belcombe and Lister were friends from 1814 until Lister’s death in 1840 and their love affair continued sporadically until Lister chose Anne Walker as her life-companion. Belcombe’s New Year letters, like

Raine's above, often refer back to the past joys of love and continue a narrative of loss and resignation triggered by what Lister, perhaps unsurprisingly, interpreted as Belcombe's betrayal in marrying Lawton. Lister copied them, presumably verbatim, into her diary, and then offered a commentary on them. The following extract is from Belcombe's New Year letter of January 1832:

*... as far as present appearances go [Charles Lawton] may live these twenty years as Mr Ford [the apothecary] told him last night tho he does bother me sadly ... I often think of what you told me in the coach from Peterborough that I was so used to Mr L[awton]'s odd ways that I should probably feel his loss more than I suspected & really my Fred [Lister's pet-name] it would be so & since I find that no unreasonable conduct would justify my leaving him I think I have made up my mind ... to make the best of it C[hables] will never change ... (SH:7/ML/E, 5 January 1832).<sup>23</sup>*

Belcombe's language and style here is plain. It is easily comprehensible to a reader who is little informed as to the history of her marriage and relationship with Lister, yet within it are references and allusions that would create the effect of intimacy for the knowledgeable reader. Belcombe avoids metaphorical expressions and offers clear links between past, present and future, providing a narrative structure even for this short passage. She uses the autobiographical 'I' confidently and does not attempt to co-opt Lister into agreement with her by using the first person plural. She is of course older than Raine who was in her late teens to early twenties when she produced the letters above. Belcombe here is forty-two and her facility with the English language may reflect her maturity as well as her skill and inclination.

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<sup>23</sup> Either Lister, or more probably Belcombe, encoded this part of her letter which appears in Lister's diary in crypt hand.

Lister's encoded commentary on and response to this letter reclaim the narrative in a manner that Liz Stanley might well identify as 'ego-focussed'. She reconstructs it in the light of her own preoccupation at the time, an ill-fated flirtation with Vere Hobart, a member of the minor aristocracy whose ranks Lister craved to join: *'this letter strikes me as remarkable she has a presentiment of what may be with Miss H[obart] have I answered her as she expected or as would be best please her? No she will be rather strengthened in her gloomy surmises & she has too much reason'* (SH:7/ML/E, 5 January 1832). Belcombe's sensitively-phrased admissions of wifely concern (posited in terms that allow Lister the moral high ground) and reflective tone are interpreted as 'gloomy', a position that accords with Lister's personal narrative of her affair with Belcombe. Stylistic differences between Belcombe's letter and Lister's diary entry may be due in part to generic differences; Lister's uneven prose and halting punctuation suggest that she is more concerned with the development of her self-justifying narrative than with the careful communication of meaning. She disarms the letter by embedding it within her diary and incorporating it into her self-construction, and her tart response suggests that, like Rousseau, she had an ideal reader in mind who would delight in her fearless candour.

Belcombe's narrative is again hijacked by Lister's frank self-revelatory style at New Year 1836. The letter from Belcombe which she transcribes in an entry for 3 January points up some of the differences between the two women's writing styles while making a wider observation on their literary self-construction: 'I [...] ask, dear Fred, how it is that I have been so given to despond & you to hope? Our natures are different, our organs of sight are different, I can't penetrate a cloud & fancy a little sunshine peeping thro' it but when I feel its warmth no one enjoys it more or feels more thankful.' Belcombe, who in the earlier passage avoided metaphor, here uses it to describe her imaginative failures, so that her language belies, or lends a kinder gloss, to her self-condemnatory sentiments.



Lister's diary entry immediately preceding this passage, however, begins by remarking that she has received a three-page letter from Marianna Lawton and then observes acidly 'Sat[ur]day new year's eve & new year's day - her last thoughts in the old year & first in the new so long given to me would not could not but keep up the custom' (SH:7/ML/E).

Lister's desire to control the interrelationships within her friendship circle was enhanced by her self-appointed role as custodian or archivist of their developing narrative. She reinforced her control by her regular review of both diary and letters. For example, an inventory of her letter drawer she made in 1822 shows that she destroyed some of Miss Marsh's letters: 'List of Miss [Marsh]'s letters before burning them & Obs[?ervations] dated May 1822.' (Liddington, 1992: 58). Liddington notes that such an act highlights the 'considerable significance [attached] to the language of letter-writing - and to the process of letter-*keeping*', which includes letters addressed to Lister, and copies or drafts of letters she had sent out, or even of letters sent by others to her friends. Raine's correspondence of August 1812 reveals that Lister kept copies of letters sent to Raine by an (unsuccessful) suitor, Captain Alexander (SH: 7/ML/ 19).

It is the letter-keeping as much as the letter-writing that indicates how important writing was to Lister and her network of friends. The letters exchanged between Anne Lister, Eliza Raine and Miss Marsh, for instance, provide narratives not only of the individuated self, but of self in relation to others; indeed, the participants in the exchange often seem to have an agreed story-line to their correspondence, although the version we now have results from Lister's later editing. An examination of these letters produces evidence of those narratives, however bowdlerized or transformed by Lister and show how Raine defined herself in relation to Lister. In a letter of 5 June 1811, Raine describes herself writing to Miss Marsh in order to obtain further information about Lister's health and of being rebuked by Lister's mother as 'a prude' for sending off a prospective suitor 'young

Thompson from Leeds' because 'his visits are rather too frequent, a young woman in my unprotected situation is imprudent in admitting such conduct'. When she writes of Mr Duffin, her guardian, it is to explain his concern for the health of Lister's father. Raine's fondness for the first Mrs Duffin leads her to ask Lister to 'be very kind to my dear Mrs Duffin Lister she is excellent in heart'. Even her reading of Sophocles has been greatly enhanced by Lister's help with her studies. Finally, she requests Lister's opinion on a fashionable new novel, 'What do you say to this "Self-Controul" Mrs Frances Swann speaks of.'<sup>24</sup> A postscript in code reminds Lister of the need for discretion in her amours but also reveals that Raine subsidised the expenses Lister incurred during these flirtations: *Dont say anything but Miss S[...]way says Miss M is practising upon you her deceptions & that she has been assailed but has resisted ... For gods sake be cautious & ... prudent as ever & in every action ... [let] prudence guide you ... I mean to send you twenty pounds ...* (SH: 7/ML/A/30).

This mode of self-definition in relation to a loved other has its dangers. In Raine's case the eventual loss of Lister's regard caused a permanent disruption in her autobiographical narrative. Lister may have brought about the breach by appearing to criticize Raine for accompanying her sister Jane to London in September 1814. The trip ended in disaster when Jane was committed to an insane asylum. This was the point at which Lister ceased writing all but the most formal of letters to Raine and instead wrote to Miss Marsh, whom Raine with some justification now considered an enemy. Lister's conduct blatantly signalled that, when it came to control, she had charge of her own narrative, and to a startling extent, of Raine's too. This betrayal seemed to cut to the heart of Raine's self and self-narrative for her response may be traced through the changes that occurred in tone and

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<sup>24</sup>Novel by Mary Brunton, *Self-Control*, c. 1810-11.

approach in letters to Lister written during the autumn of 1814. On 10 October, Raine wrote:

I thank you for your friendly reply to the particulars of which I thought it was right you shd be informed - I think from your pointed & lengthened approbation of Mr Duffin's merits, you have not hesitated to suppose me very much to blame in not havg asked his opinion when I was situated so awkwardly with my sister - in answer to which I shall merely say that in any conduct to him my conscience fully acquits me before that Being who can alone be the Judge of his creatures (SH:7/ML/A/90).

It was rare for Raine to adopt such an assertive tone in her letters. Here she makes little reference to Lister's needs or expectations, and appears, for once, careless of Lister's good opinion. The seriousness of the rift is indicated by Raine's request that Lister destroy their old letters and return those of Captain Alexander: 'Shd they be still in your possession, I beg you will burn them - Whenever it may be convenient I shall be obliged to you to collect Capt Alexander's letters to you, to me, & mine that you may have, to him, & enclose them in a parcel directed to me at York.' The urgency of this request (one Lister did not comply with) shows Raine's desperate struggle to regain control of the joint narrative constituted by their letters. The finale to her letter is marked by an uncharacteristically sarcastic tone:

Before I conclude my letter, I shall remark to you that for the past few years I have not been an unobserving spectator of the entire sway Miss Marsh's arts have gained over your judgement as well as that of Mr Duffin - I predict, however, that there will be a day mature reflection, when your present opinions of us both will change, & I hope that you will then find me justifiable in those actions you

have hitherto condemned - I wish you health & happiness & believe me my dear  
Miss Lister

Yrs affectionately & obliged E. Raine (SH: 7/ML/A/90).

Raine's handwriting, as well as her tone, changes in this letter to a large formal script that contrasts vividly with the intimacy of the small hasty hand employed in earlier letters. Both changes signalled the end of whatever closeness remained between the two women, and a gradual downhill descent for Raine's control of her own narrative and, apparently, sanity. The complicated litotes construction 'I have not been an unobserving spectator' encompasses both defence and accusation. In this single phrase, Raine implies that she has been taken for granted and relegated from the friendship, but that her passivity has been angrily watchful. It is a statement loaded with self-destructive bitterness. Within a few weeks of writing it, Raine was committed to an insane asylum where her ability to define her autobiographical self through correspondence was limited both by her poor mental health and by the withdrawal of the privileges of pen and paper: 'Mr Mather forbid her the Use of Pen & Ink more than half an hour in the day, for he very properly thought She strained her faculties by writing so very much' (SH: 7/ML/ 64).<sup>25</sup>

Letters written after Raine's committal lack the intimate assumptions of former times, and are pathetic in their attempts at formality. Their autobiographical narrative is now to be read between the lines as Raine relinquishes control and tries sadly to construct a different, humbler, more acquiescent, self. Her former fluency becomes notably fragmented, hesitant and disjointed:

My dear Miss Lister, Your last letter to me has afforded me more pleasure than I  
have experienced & I thank you for kind assurances of affection & friendship - You

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<sup>25</sup> Raine was committed to the York Retreat, a progressive Quaker asylum, at which Marianna Belcombe's father and brother were consultants. See Appendix 1.

have always been my friend - I have sometimes doubted it - but now I hope never more to do so - Whatever pique resentment & ill-will I may have hitherto shewn to you, I request you will be so generous as to bury in oblivion - I acknowledge it not only to you - but to those to whom I have during the last two months sought only to injure you - I trust there has been an apology for me - will you think it - will you forgive all I may have said of you in the months of my derangement - ( SH: 7/ML/A/93).

The use of dashes creates a sense of disjointure, hesitancy, uncertainty, but perhaps also of anger. Raine's formal announcement is almost lost within her digressions, as though she does not wish to write it at all. The repetition of the pronouns 'I' and 'you' emphasizes the oppositional nature of her relationship with Lister and is almost a litany, reminding her reader of her loss of the shared narrative of desire and friendship.

While these exchanges were taking place between Lister and Raine, Lister was also corresponding with Miss Marsh. After the death of Mr Duffin's first wife, who had been much loved by Raine, he married Miss Marsh. In July 1812 Raine came into her personal fortune and her place in the Duffin household seems to have declined from that point. A hint of Eliza Raine's alleged insanity came in a letter to Anne Lister from Miss Marsh on 31 August 1814. The way that Marsh conveys this burning piece of information at once suggests a semi-fictional tone: 'I shall begin with the curious history of Miss Raine' (SH: 7/ML/59). The word 'history' is significant here for not only does it clearly suggest a sequential narrative but offers an account of its mode of construction; 'history' in the early nineteenth century was a term interchangeable with 'novel', while 'a curious history' was a journalistic mode for introducing bizarre or fantastic newspaper stories of the cow-with-five-legs kind. Marsh thus acknowledges the relationship between Raine's story, as she constructs it in her letter, and its fictional counterparts, and emphasizes its sensational

nature. She also regularly assumes the rhetorical stance of a moral commentator when writing about Raine, as if composing a public document rather than a private epistle.

Raine, as I have described, was of mixed racial origin and the metaphor Marsh deploys in a letter of 24 September 1814 to identify the true source of Raine's madness is exceedingly distasteful by present-day standards and venomous at least by those of her own time: 'if she has [a heart], it is a black one ... I have done with her & all the Black Progeny for ever ... my ... opinion [is] that where black Blood is there can be nothing amiable' (SH: 7/ML/59).

In 1814 Raine was committed to an asylum by her guardian. This provided Marsh with a further opportunity to practice her considerable writing skills. In a letter to Lister of 7 December 1814 her opening lines are as dramatic as any Gothic novel:

... the poor unfortunate Eliza. She continues much the same, sometimes giving hopes by a long interval of Reason that She is coming about, when again She falls into her Wildness & is as bad as ever ... She strained her faculties with writing so very much [long] strange wild incoherent Letters to Mrs B[elcombe, Marianna's mother] - 2 or 3 times a day - now She has taken to Sketching & has done many little things - of the melancholy kind - all wretchedly bad except one which She calls Mariana's Tomb ... (SH:7/ML/64).

Marsh's description of the onset of Raine's illness during an evening when she was staying with the Belcombes is theatrical and hyperbolic, 'the last night she stayed there - such a Night I suppose was never passed ... - She is dreadfully abusive when a Paroxism comes on & her Imprecations are most dreadful as Dr & Mrs B[elcombe] found' (SH:7/ML/64). The peppering of capital letters suggests that Marsh's writing style was rooted in eighteenth-century practice. She employs language habitual to the description of mental illness during the period, yet constructs the scene in a manner reminiscent of the novels of Ann Radcliffe

(1764-1823) in which female unrestraint and genetic degeneracy lead to morbidity, transgression and insanity.<sup>26</sup> In Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, for example, the heroine is warned: 'Sister! Beware of the first indulgence of the passions ... Their course, if not checked then, is rapid - their force is uncontrollable - they lead us we know not whither' (Radcliffe, 1980: 646) Marsh's language of self-righteous horror uncannily echoes Mary Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel, *Maria* (1794), about a woman committed to a madhouse by her abusive husband, which was intended to demonstrate 'the wrongs of different classes of women' by delineating the oppressive treatment, including the language of imprisonment, with which female insanity was treated' (Wollstonecraft, 1992: 60). On inquiring why she was to be kept from the world, '[Maria] was briefly told, in reply, that the malady was hereditary, and the fits not occurring at very long and irregular intervals, she must be carefully watched; for the length of these lucid periods only rendered her more mischievous, when any vexation or caprice brought on the paroxysm of phrensy' (Wollstonecraft, 1992: 63) Forever after her committal, Raine was referred to as 'the poor unfortunate', a designation both imprisoning and unrelenting while apparently offering sympathy. Marsh was at pains to disclaim the account of Raine's decline as her sole production and to demonstrate that the narrative of the progress of Raine's insanity was a joint construction with Lister, for she wrote, 'I think *with you* that Eliza is a little in the same way as Jane' for 'kindness seems to make her hate people ... - I gave her some good lectures upon it' (SH: 7/ML/59, my emphasis).

The sequence of letters I have followed here demonstrates the importance of literary activity, diary- and letter-writing, to women of the middle-class and gentry in Lister's friendship circle and the struggles for authorial control in the construction of self- and

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<sup>26</sup> For examples of the treatment and language of insanity in the early nineteenth century, see Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (1985).

group-narratives. Between them, Raine, Marsh and Lister created an extraordinary literary production out of events and experiences that must have been confused, disordered, and often unrelated. Marsh's letters are constructed in a story-telling mode that is both conversational and intimate; it draws the reader in, encourages her to elaborate upon and develop its fairy-tale elements, the dangers of dark skin, fear of the adoptive stranger or changeling, hatred of the single independent woman, perhaps with a subtext of homophobia and the price to be paid for sexual abominations.<sup>27</sup> But while Marsh and Lister produced one version of Raine's narrative, each constructed another for themselves in which they featured as the aggrieved party, the victim, the careless lover, or the concerned friend. Lister, however, had the final editorial hand. It is her version of the narrative, her selection and ordering of material and plot, that we have today.

Raine appears never to have recovered the autobiographical impulse devastated by the loss of that loved other, Anne Lister. Marsh herself hinted that Raine's mental state was attributable to her separation from Lister: 'she has never been herself since she lost your Intimacy & Friendship' (SH: 7/ML/59).

### Conclusion

The letters of Eliza Raine and Miss Marsh were kept at Shibden Hall in tied bundles. Lister did not return Raine's letters as requested, for they are still in the Shibden Hall Muniments. It is clear from the 1822 document, 'Contents of my letter-Drawer', that Lister burned a number of Miss Marsh's letters, and that over four hundred letters exchanged between Lister and Marianna Belcombe had disappeared by 1850 when trustees of the Muniments accounted for the documents (Liddington, 1992: 58). It is possible that

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<sup>27</sup> Marsh conspicuously fails to develop that other traditional fairy-tale character, the wicked stepmother.



Lister's eventual partner, Anne Walker, may have destroyed some items. After Lister's death she was discovered in a distressed state in the Red Room at Shibden Hall where 'Papers were strewn about in complete confusion' (Liddington, 1992: 11). It is most likely that Lister got rid of the letters while carrying out her regular survey of the progress of her self-narrative.

Lister's self-constructive activities were resolutely rooted in taxonomic and literary procedures. She provided monthly indexes for her diary entries of books read or ordered, journeys made, letters written and received, people met, bills paid, trees planted. She copied letters she sent and reported on those she received from friends, secretaries of local clubs, estate contractors and tradesmen; she revised and edited the entries and reworked the indexes. She applied the same editorial procedures to her collections of other people's writing as to her own work; whatever she hid or destroyed was done with the aim of presenting a coherent and lucid narrative. She collected letters together by sender, date or topic, and kept lists of those received and sent, as the 'Contents of my letter-Drawer' shows, and then revised and edited the lists and letters. She was subject-writer of her diary and letters and historian and archivist of the self-constructive narrative created by both her own writing and that of her friends.

Neither the learned essay nor the collection of letters Lister projected in 1821 ever did get published, and probably were never produced. Therefore, in the narrow terms she espoused, Lister was not an author. However, she stamped her mark of authorship upon the collection of written work, diary, letters, lists, accounts and transactions now housed in the Shibden Hall Muniments. This is her life's work, a project she laid out for herself in a diary entry of 16 October 1817, when she was twenty-six: 'The general rummage among my letters and papers takes a great deal of time & puts me sadly out of my way - but as I have never had my things to rights as they ought to be, 'tis high time to begin if I mean to

get it done in my lifetime' (Whitbread, 1988: 16). It is a considerable achievement, for, despite Lister's sudden and unexpected death, a coherent and sequential narrative emerges from the disparate documents which she has in some cases carefully revised, annotated, edited and rewritten.

For women like Lister, social and gendered limitations created a barrier to a claim to the title 'author' as much as anxiety about the male literary tradition described by Gilbert and Gubar. Like Barrett Browning, Lister was nervous about her scholarly qualifications for the title. She was aware of the exclusions faced by women who wished to earn a place within the literary establishment and went to great lengths to mitigate her exclusion from university education by substituting a rigorous programme of self-education. She was an early exemplar of those principles of self-help that were characteristic of the nineteenth century and which Charlotte Brontë also practised. She shared with Brontë a diffidence about her private writings, as though they were merely practice for the real thing, a preparation for a bound volume with a publisher's address in London. In her diary, Lister could resist or circumvent the literary, academic and social conventions that bounded women's relationship to writing and unapologetically situate herself as subject-writer, avoiding the kind of painful convolutions of subjectivity that Mary Shelley felt obliged to engage in. At the same time, she could employ her pen to reinforce her social identity, to establish her position within her friendship circle and to monitor and control its interdependent literary relationships and production. Clearly she was not alone in her interest in writing, for my examination of the diaries of her local contemporaries and the exchanges between her intimate friends indicates the significance of literary activity to women from her gentrified circle. As I have shown, Lister's lovers and friends produced private writings of considerable sophistication, using it for self-constructive purposes, to jostle for relational positions and to negotiate some of the most important experiences of

their lives. Despite the problematics of authorship for eighteenth-century women, the importance of writing to them and to Lister should not therefore be underestimated. One of the restraints imposed on Raine during her early days in the asylum was the removal of pen and paper so that she could not write. The Retreat was a progressive institution which did not use the violent methods of correction common to public asylums. Her doctors nevertheless perceived Raine's desire to write as potentially dangerous, and forbade it. Despite her conventional views on authorship, Lister believed that *not* writing would damage her emotional and physical well-being. It would appear that the pen was charged with symbolic meaning and that its employment endowed its holder with considerable power.

It is possible that Lister herself may have had some longer view in the production of her diary; one that encompassed a notion of authorship beyond publishing in her lifetime. Although she was restricted by gendered boundaries, her self-identification with the Romantic ideal of masculine subjectivity may have encouraged her, like Rousseau, to anticipate a readership in the future, which would embrace her originality, acknowledge her ability to rework social rules to suit her own ego-focused ends and recognize a radical transgression that she could not voice during her life, incompatible as it was with her central conservative role as a member of the landed gentry. Perhaps, as Whitbread has hinted, she even hoped for posthumous publication of a bound volume of her memoirs. Despite all her apparent secrecy, she was not absolutely discreet with her diary and seemed to relish the notoriety it earned her, encouraging knowledge of its existence and contents by giving out copies of the crypt hand and reading aloud extracts to her guests. Thus she may before her sudden death in 1840 have partially achieved her 'ambition in the literary way ... for a name in the world' (Whitbread, 1988: 82), by deploying her literary skills in many different ways to enhance, or reinforce, her public reputation.



## Chapter 2. 'Books! Ye are my spirit's oil': The Readerly

### Author

Among Anne Lister's letters for 1816, carefully transcribed in her boldest handwriting, is a 'List of Books read or purchased by Anne Lister'. It begins:

Thurs 27 June Finished readg "Memories of the Marchioness De  
Larochejaquelein ... Translated fr. the French.

Sat 29 June, finished readg Glenarvon. In three volumes. Lond. Printd for Henry  
Colburn. 1816"

On the adjoining page, the list continues:

A Picture of Italy by Henry Coxe, Esq in one portable vol. ...

Picture of Paris by Louis Tronchet ...

The Traveller's Complete Guide thro' Belgium, Holland & Germany by Chs.  
Campbell Esq ...

Travels in Italy by Mariana Starke ...

London, being a Complete Guide to the British Capital by John Wallis ...

Richardson's new map of London & its Environs to the year 1816 ...

British Tourists, or Traveller's Pocket Companion thro' Eng-Wales, Scotland  
& Ireland, by William Mavor ...

Letters fr. France by Henry Redhead Yorke Esq ...

Physician's Vade Mecum, by the Revd Joseph Townsend ...

Chemical Philosophy - by A.J. Fourcroy, transd by Wm Desmond Esq ...

The Chemical Pocket book by James Parkinson (SH: 7/ML/73).<sup>1</sup>

The lack of commentary on this page suggests that the listed books were as yet unread. The two pages together, however, give some indication of Lister's eager consumption of reading-matter and the breadth of her interests. From her earliest days, Lister's diurnal routines were dominated by writing and reading. The later volumes of her diary are supplemented by a literary index, in which she accounts for books read, purchased and recommended. When she became mistress of Shibden Hall, the establishment of a library was one of her most ambitious projects, and, from childhood, books and reading were a means both to gain and hold on to the social status she craved, and to investigate and validate the origins of her sexual identity. For Lister, books and their contents were charged with powerful meanings and were an essential part of her self-construction.

I have shown in Chapter 1 how important authorship was to Lister's sense of self, and how the daily production of a literary self-narrative featured in her construction of identity. How and why did literature and reading figure to such an extent in Lister's self-production? In this chapter, I look at the place of reading in her life-narrative, and try to trace the development of her relationship to it. What were her early experiences of reading, who were her writing peers and influences, and what was the significance of all of these in the literary production of her self?

I also ask how far Lister's writing reflects or adapts eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literary conventions. To what extent was Lister's self-construction mediated through literary models? Epistolary novels of the eighteenth century, like those of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding, had, I argue, a peculiar and remarkable resonance in the

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<sup>1</sup> All spelling and punctuation is reproduced as in original ms.

production of Lister's social and sexual identity, and in the explicit confessional style of the encoded diaries, as did the ubiquitous memoirs of recent historical events, travelogues and gazetteers that formed a part of Lister's reading. All these literary forms, it may be noted, have in common some element of first-person narrative, making them entirely suitable for emulation and assimilation in letter and diary-writing.

### **Anne Lister and the conduct book**

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there was plenty of advice available to young women about their reading practices. Manuals offering direction in all aspects of life's conduct abounded, written, for example, by 'a tender father' (Gregory, 1801: title page), or to 'my dearest niece' (Chapone, 1773: B), or from 'An Unfortunate Mother' to 'Her Absent daughters' (quoted in Uphaus and Foster, 1991: 269). As the nineteenth century progressed, such texts were addressed to a wide female audience, as in Elizabeth Sandford's *Woman and her Social and Domestic Character* (1831), or Anna Jameson's *Characteristics of Women* (1832). The advice varied in detail, but rarely in tone.

Religious matters were emphasized, but feminine accomplishments of all kinds were given the same prescriptive treatment. Mrs Chapone, for example, in her *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, addressed to a Young Lady* (1773), offered instruction in 'the regulation of the Heart and Affections' and 'On Politeness and Accomplishments', as well as in 'the Study of the holy Scriptures' and 'On the Manner and Course of reading History' (Chapone, 1773: contents page). The writers of these conduct books often had low expectations of women as readers and tended to reinforce the idea of reading as an accomplishment which could be paraded along with needlework and dancing as an indication of eligibility for marriage. 'The great Art of Education', according to Lady

Sarah Pennington, 'consists in assigning to each its proper Place' (quoted in Uphaus and Foster, 1991: 275). Such books continued to be popular reading-matter for middle-class young women, however, and Anne Lister was still reading them when she was thirty-two, when she was 'particularly pleased' with a conduct book called *The Art of Employing Time* (Whitbread, 1988: 315).

There is evidence of their influence in her youthful letters. In the Shibden collection is a draft of a letter Lister wrote to Raine around 1806. Lister was fifteen and had just left Manor School. Raine had remained behind at the school in York. Lister's practice of making several drafts of her letters suggests an awareness of the power of the written word as a mediator between self and the world, and an anxiety about the effects of form and technique, while keeping the drafts displays a fine degree of taxonomic meticulousness. The entire 1806 letter reads:

My dearest Eliza,

So anxious am I to know whether you are comfortable & how you arrived at the Manor that I can scarcely persuade myself to have patience to wait a day or two for your ever welcome Epistle which though a poor substitute for your Company will give unspeakable pleasure to one whose only study is your happiness I hope my dear Girl you are sufficiently a Philosopher to make you content in all Stations & to consider every thing for the best and our parting as a circumstance pre-ordained for our future & greater comfort Ah! dear Liz - I'm preaching up Doctrine that is of little service to me as distracted to lose you I sigh and lament me in vain fully verifying the old Proverb that the more you have the more you would have

(I study much to stay my grief

And think on your letters for relief) (SH: 7/ML/A/1).



Jill Liddington contrasts the ‘perky artlessness’ of childhood letters like this with the ‘mannered rhetoric’ of the later correspondence (Liddington, 1994: 52).<sup>2</sup> This letter is not without artifice, however. Formalised and clichéd phrases like ‘your ever welcome Epistle’, ‘unspeakable pleasure’, and ‘one whose only study is your happiness’ are the stock-in-trade of letter-writing in polite eighteenth-century society. Lister’s allusion to Voltaire, ‘consider every thing for the best and our parting as a circumstance pre-ordained for our future & greater comfort’, is self-conscious and rather precocious.<sup>3</sup> The florid prose of her final sentence is reminiscent of an eighteenth-century romantic novel, ‘I’m preaching up Doctrine that is of little service to me as distracted to lose you I sigh and lament me in vain fully verifying the old Proverb that the more you have the more you would have.’ These stylised expressions combine with childish spelling errors, ‘wether’, greif’ and releif’, and the occasional term of endearment, like the patronising, ‘my dear Girl’, and ‘Ah! dear Liz’, to produce a studied effect of spontaneity and cleverness. A fictional version of just such a letter occurs in Eliza Haywood’s novella, *The Distress’d Orphan* (1726): ‘I am inclined to believe you have Honour and Good-nature, and am half afraid I shall soon have occasion for a Friend possessed of these Qualifications; if such a Time arrives, I shall make tryal how far you are desirous of obliging ANNILIA’ (Haywood, 1995: 42). Lister’s concluding couplet is perhaps the most earnestly childlike of her effusions and is lent a presumably unintended charm by the spelling mistakes.

The ‘artlessness’ that Liddington refers to can be found in Lister’s earlier letters to her mother. Although in later years she grew ashamed of Rebecca Lister’s drinking and attendant coarseness of habit and acquaintance and to a great extent cut herself off from

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<sup>2</sup> Liddington compares this letter with one Lister wrote in 1810 to Isabella Norcliffe which includes the words, ‘would that I ... might have some better claim to that valuable aid to my pleasure which the pen of Isabella can only give to the heart’ (Liddington, 1994: 52).

<sup>3</sup> In Voltaire’s *Candide*, ‘All is for the best in this best of all possible worlds’ is the motto of the tutor Pangloss as he follows the innocent young man Candide through a number of ludicrous trials and adventures (Voltaire, 1947: 144).

her, Lister's adolescent letters to her mother employ the warm, filial style, apparently lacking in contrivance, of a dutiful and zestful daughter. She was twelve, and staying with her aunt and uncle at Shibden, when she wrote, 'How am I dressed on a Sunday, I have got a new Bonnet, a new White Tippet, a pair of new Stays, and my new Frock made up' (Green, 1992: 31). At thirteen she was still using this jolly, breathless style in letters to her mother: 'I daresay Sam & John when they have a Holiday often go to look for Bird Nests, tell them that I know where there is a Thristle, and a Bulsfinch, there is a Magpie Nest in the Yew Tree, which is the first I ever found in the Garden' (SH: 7/ML/9).

Lister's style and language in the 1806 letter, however, are of the kind recommended by conduct manuals of the period. She had learned her lessons well (apart from her spelling, which rapidly improves from this time) and could reproduce successfully the correct degree of circumspection and elaborate social nicety required of a middle-class correspondence. A conduct book of 1801, *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, by Dr John Gregory, opens its chapter on 'Friendship, Love, Marriage' with advice couched in the same tone as Lister's letter:

The luxury and dissipation that prevails in genteel life, as it corrupts the heart in many respects, so it renders it incapable of warm, sincere and steady friendship. A happy choice of friends will be of the utmost consequence to you, as they may assist you by their advice and good offices. But the immediate gratification which friendship affords to a warm, open, and ingenuous heart, is of itself a sufficient motive to court it (Gregory, 1801: 54).

Mary Wollstonecraft accused Dr Gregory's 'easy familiar style' of embodying 'arguments that so speciously support opinions which ... have had the most baneful effect on the morals and manners of the female world' (Wollstonecraft, 1992: 199). This extract demonstrates not only the fulsome prose with which such arguments were phrased but

also the importance of female friendship in the value-system of the early nineteenth century. Anne Lister's short letter had to encompass a variety of social and personal impulses, needs and expectations. By imitating the flowery tones sanctioned by conduct manuals and by inviting a similar response from its recipient, the letter signalled the existence of an appropriate romantic friendship and thus fulfilled a proper female duty in a manner approved by Dr Gregory. Such a letter might serve as a kind of sampler on which a young girl could practise the arts of friendship for later more important occasions.

Lister's 1806 letter to Raine provided a showcase for her cleverness with language and her book-learning. But, at the same time that she was successfully satisfying the requirements of genteel society, she was also acting outside social convention, for the letter was a communication between clandestine lovers. Dr Gregory fastidiously brings to the attention of his daughters the occasional necessity for secrecy, a condition of which he generally disapproves: 'There is [a] case in which I suspect it is proper to be secret, not so much from motives of prudence, as delicacy; I mean in love matters' (Gregory, 1801: 56). Gregory probably did not have in mind the kind of love-affair that existed between Lister and Raine. Yet they too regarded secrecy as necessary. There may be a number of reasons for this. By excluding others from their communication, they created a greater intimacy between them. Discovery of their sexual relationship may have brought disapproval and sanctions. They may indeed have felt obliged, despite their flouting of conventional behaviour in other respects, to observe social strictures concerning love affairs, as recommended by Gregory. But secrecy also reinforced relations of power between them, which, as I demonstrated in Chapter 1, Lister used to her advantage.

Lister's increasing facility in conveying tone and mood through a variety of different literary styles and techniques is demonstrated in this 1806 letter. Carefully unpacked, the

letter reveals: the amiable and romantic friend prescribed by Dr Gregory and his ilk; a clever, humorous school-girl familiar with Voltaire and the novelistic construction of romantic friendship; a middle-class young woman of appropriately sentimental sensibilities who is well-versed in Doctrines, Proverbs and clichés, and the secret lover and adventurer derived from the mock-heroics of the eighteenth-century novel and memoir. This latter role demands the popular literary devices of double-entendre and innuendo. The injunction to ‘consider ... our parting as a circumstance pre-ordained for our future & greater comfort’, formulaic as it may sound, is likely to have had a more profound resonance for two girls who planned to live together as sexual partners when they either came into (in Eliza Raine’s case) or made (in Lister’s) their fortunes. The letter, then, is a composite of the secret and the public. It displays Lister’s command of reading, and writing, appropriate to her sex and class, while clandestinely signalling a hidden subtext.

Lister and Raine corresponded frequently, sometimes daily, from 1806 until late in 1814 when Raine’s mental health deteriorated to the point where she was placed in an asylum. The two young women engaged, therefore, in a significant literary exchange, forming their respective styles in relation to each other as well as to external influences. Their relationship was so intense that for a while it seemed as though a composite style would emerge from their written communication. Their later correspondence shows, however, that Lister began to use conduct-book norms more sparingly, while Raine continued to employ the formulae recommended for the expression of female friendship (though increasingly, as these failed to elicit the required response, the form breaks down and becomes ragged and disjointed). As peers and fellow experimenters with literary style and effect, they each provided the other with a control against which they could define and measure their literary achievements, and indeed, their self-narratives. They also

struggled to gain the upper hand in defining tone and style. A letter from Raine to Lister of 'Wednesday. June 5. 1811. Near 6 oclock' may help to demonstrate some of these effects. It begins with an encrypted postscript scribbled beside the date: '*Anything you want we will send you so dont be bashful -*'. The start to the letter proper is equally effusive:

My dear dear Lister

How long it is since I wrote to you, well may you exclaim [... ]  
sincerely do I do the same with remorse of conscience, you never doubt my affection therefore you will not have been so unkind as to impute my silence to such a cause. Lister you know me too well to imagine that my attachment for you can know any diminution at either your absence or any other of these fluctuating occurrences of this life. In the heat of noise or bustle, or in the bosom of retirement or solitude the image of my dear dear Friend remains perfect to my remembrance, perfect to my heart & unchanged. If reason you shall have for my hitherto silence, it has arisen solely from the uninterrupted gaiety I have been obliged to enter into; this is a compliance we must bestow on Custom & the regulations of Fashion - ever since the receipt of your first love letter I have been immersed in one continued dissipation - sometimes the scene has been pleasantly varied by my passing a few days at your House, & frequently dining there singly ...

Tuesday I remained to celebrate your dear Brother's birthday ...(SH: 7/ML/A/30).

Raine was twenty when she wrote this, but in the early part of her letter she does not stray far from the letter-writing conventions approved by Dr Gregory, who recommended that:

In the choice of your friends, have your principal regard to goodness of heart and fidelity. If they also possess taste and genius, that will still make them more agreeable and useful companions ... If you have the good fortune to meet with

any who deserve the name of friends, unbosom yourself to them with the most unsuspecting confidence. It is one of the world's maxims, never to trust any person with a secret, the discovery of which could give you any pain; but it is the maxim of a little mind and a cold heart, unless where it is the effect of frequent disappointments and bad usage (Gregory, 1801: 54-6).

In all her letters to Lister (with one or two important exceptions) Raine was careful to embrace the kind of advice offered above. She was affectionate; she acknowledged and apologised for her failings, and offered confidences and secrets apparently with complete frankness. The opening of the 1811 letter is, then, a model epistle of friendship, mixing apology with endearment and social nicety, revealing Raine's dependence on Lister with a breakneck account of outings and meetings, continually interspersed with allusions to her friend's welfare, thoughts and relations. The only startling note is struck by the term 'love letter', which, even between romantic friends, is perhaps a touch intimate.

Mrs Chapone, in her *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, addressed to a Young Lady* (1773), is as eager as Dr Gregory to point out the benefits of close friendships between girls. She is, however, a little chary of the open exchange of confidences, cautioning that while 'the grand cement of this kind of friendship is telling secrets', it 'has often helped to draw silly girls into very unhappy adventures'. She rather encourages her young readers to find a friend, preferably 'eight or ten years older than yourself' who will 'advise and ... improve you' (Chapone, 1773: 140). She stresses that young women should watch over each other's moral development and offer advice and criticism where necessary, including in the choice of reading matter. Indeed, the practice of friends providing book lists for each other continued well after the eighteenth century, as a letter of 1834 from Charlotte Brontë to her close friend, Ellen Nussey, demonstrates:

You ask me to recommend some books for your perusal; I will do so in as few words as I can. If you like poetry let it be first rate, Milton, Shakespeare, Thomson, Goldsmith Pope ... Scott, Byron, Camp[b]ell, Wordsworth and Southey Now Ellen don't be startled at the names of Shakespeare, and Byron. Both these were great Men and their works are like themselves. You will know how to chuse the good and avoid the evil ... (Smith, 1995: 130).

Lister and Raine, like Brontë and Nussey, were of similar ages, and yet Lister seems to have taken the role recommended by Mrs Chapone, which was perhaps characteristic of the commanding masculine approach she adopted in both emotional and literary matters. In the later parts of the 1811 letter, Raine acknowledges Lister's direction of her reading. Her understanding of Sophocles has been greatly enhanced by Lister's help with her studies, she writes, and she solicits her friend's opinion of the novel by Mary Brunton, *Self-Control* (1810) (SH: 7/ML/A/30).<sup>4</sup> Lister's involvement in Raine's reading, demonstrated in this letter, may have been customary among young women, an established device for cementing friendship. Yet the overall effect achieved by the letter is to create a web of allusions to their relationship, reinforced by references that are often based on their shared reading experience, and a shared narrative constructed through reading and writing letters.

### **Anne Lister's education**

The friendship of Lister and Raine was begun at York Manor School in 1805, but it is unlikely that Lister gained the academic confidence to instruct her friend in her

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<sup>4</sup> *Self-Control* is a long novel in which the heroine is constantly persecuted and traumatized.

programme of reading there. Manor School was established in 1789 by the widow of a York dancing-master, and in Lister's day was run by her daughter, Miss Hargrave, and her teaching partner, Mrs Mills, who had taught there for over twenty years. They probably brought in one or two specialist teachers, for French or dancing perhaps, but taught most subjects themselves. It was one of those 'superior private schools catering, of course, for children of middle-class parents who could pay an adequate fee for "a genteel course of education". They appealed especially to those who wished their daughters to learn some French and needlework and to acquire polish and refinement' (Benson, 1932: 50). It was on her first day at this school that Caroline Walker was astonished to meet with girls of 'so common an appearance, to us they looked like twenty little maid servants dancing' (SH: 3/AB/20/127). Manor School was more of a finishing school than a serious academic institution, and Lister was probably referring to her time there when she wrote in 1825, 'What I call grounding is perhaps not generally acquired at a girls' school, even in England' (Green, 1992: 82).

Lister's studious habits seem to have been formed earlier. She was expelled from her dame school in Ripon in 1798 when she was only seven, but tutors were employed for her until she went to Manor School, York. She stayed for long periods with her uncle and aunt at Shibden Hall during 1802 and 1803 (the later visit lasted nearly a year) and there she was taught by the Misses Sarah and Grace Mellin of Halifax. A formal letter of February 1803 to her aunt at Shibden Hall reveals not only that she read precociously for her age, but that she had acquired a taste for purchasing books, an activity that later led her to establish a fine library at Shibden Hall. She mentions in this letter reading *Georgical Essays*, by A. Hunter (1803), a study of agricultural methods which is 'very improving and at the same time entertaining I was always fond of Farming', an unusual interest for a twelve-year-old girl, though not perhaps for one who had already set her



mind to the serious contemplation of estate management (or at least had the desire to impress upon her addressee that she had). She asks her aunt to buy her 'a Dictionary I mean one of the very best ... one that will not only instruct me in Spelling but in the ... fashionable way of pronunciation. I have five Guineas to spare and I dont know how I can expend it better to my own satisfaction ... it will be a valuable addition to my collection of Books' (Green, 1991: 28-9). Learning, this letter suggests, formed part of Lister's social aspirations even before her spell at the York School, where her class ambitions developed rapidly, while reading and the acquisition of books (whether read or not) were important to her ability to construct a social self. It is also striking that she took care to inform those around her of her reading practices, probably with some conscious intention of creating a favourable impression of studious diligence, and thus perhaps dissociating herself from the irregularity and intemperance of her parental household. Not only reading, but being known to be reading, and reading appropriately, were important to the pursuit of her class ambitions.

If agriculture was an unusual but practical study (in terms both of its future application and the impression it made), then so too was a facility with ancient languages which would open up a world often denied to women. Lister's classical education began in 1804, when she returned home to Market Weighton, where she had lessons with the Vicar, the Rev. George Skelding: 'I go to Mr Skeldings every Morning at nine o Clock, and stay an hour, Mr S: is so good as to teach me Latin' (SH: 7/ML/10). He supplied her with the vigorous programme of study set out below:

Monday - From eight till nine

Writing and Accompter

From nine till half after ten Practice

Till twelve Draw

Till one read

From three till six

Geometry Astronomy Geography & Heraldry

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Tuesday - From six in the morning till

eight And from nine till ten

Geometry Astronomy Geography & Heraldry

From ten till half after eleven Practice

From half after eleven till one writing & accompter

(SH: 7/ML/8, 19 January 1804).

Each day of the week is laid out in this way. In addition, he recommended that Lister have 'Two Latin Grammar Lessons everyday except Tuesday & Saturday one in the morning & one in the Afternoon (SH: 7/ML/8).

Lister observed the studious practices established under the Rev. Skelding for the rest of her life and they were to have a profound effect on her reading, and on the development of her social and sexual self. Muriel Green points out that when she left the Manor School in 1806, Lister had by no means finished with her education, and that, on the contrary, she did not consider her serious study to have begun until later on in her teens (Green, 1991:19). Lister recognised the limitations of the education provided by a private girls' boarding-school, though she conceded that for boys it was different: 'Eton is good, and Westminster is good ... A boy may be made a scholar at either' (Green, 1991: 85). In consequence, after leaving the York school, when she began to spend protracted periods at Shibden Hall, she arranged to continue her study under the Rev. Samuel Knight, Vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Halifax. Diary entries for 1806, 1807 and 1808 declare the rapid development of her classical studies:

Tues Dec 16<sup>th</sup> [1806] begun Y<sup>e</sup> Greek Testament

Sunday 17 Sept [1807] ... begun Demosthenes

Wed 24<sup>th</sup> Feb [1808] finished 10 lib of Homer

Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> “ Finished 4 lib Horace's Odes

Wednesday March 2 Begun Xenophon's Memorabilia

and left off Homer for a while (SH: 7/ML/E/26).

The learning Lister sought was not of the kind considered appropriate for young women by conduct manuals such as that of Mrs Chapone where the recommendation to study the Holy Scriptures, geography, chronology and history was tempered by the exhortation that failure to do so would result in an 'inability to direct and assist the pursuits of your children' (Chapone, 1773: 223). Lister preferred to take the advice of those who had had the benefit of a masculine education. Her diary for Christmas 1815 records a book list she had requested of Dr Stephen Belcombe, the brother of her friend and lover, Marianna Belcombe, under the headings 'Poetry', 'History' and 'Philosophy'. The latter included Ovid's works, 'Stewarts - Elements of the philosophy of the human Mind' and 'Smith's Theory of Mind' and suggests that Lister, perhaps as a result of Raine's committal (ironically, to the York asylum run by Stephen Belcombe and his father), was interested in the developing science of psychology (though the list may also have reflected Belcombe's own concerns). Dr Belcombe concluded with the observation that 'Philosophy gives strength - History - fulness/Poetry elevation to the Understanding -' and a motto that may have been more apt than even he supposed:

This injunction in uno

Will make a Lady such as few know (SH: 7/ML/71).

The index to diary entries for September and October 1816 suggest that Lister was as interested in recent history as in the topics recommended by Belcombe. Her 'List of

books mentioned in this volume' includes 'Letters from an English Resident at Paris (in 1815)'; 'Wakefield's Mental Improvement'; 'Fellowes's account of Paris in July 1815'; 'De Beauchamp's narrative of the Invasion of France'; 'Paris Chitchat', and 'Scott's visit to Paris 1814' (SH:7/ML/E).

Lister's programme of self-instruction continued apace. In 1817, by which time she was twenty-six and living permanently with her aunt and uncle, she set out the following daily timetable for herself,:

I mean to proceed diligently, in the hope that, if I live, I may sometime attain a tolerable proficiency in mathematical studies. I would rather be a philosopher than a polyglot, and mean to turn my attention eventually and principally to natural philosophy. For the present I mean to devote my mornings before breakfast to Greek, and afterwards, till dinner, to divide the time equally between Euclid and arithmetic, till I have waded through Walkingham [a compendium of arithmetic by Francis Walkingame: London 1751], when I shall recommence my long neglected algebra. I must read a page or two of French now and then, when I can. The afternoons and evenings are set apart for general reading, for walking half-an-hour or three-quarters, (and) practice on the flute (Green, 1991: 20).

The reading opened up by her scholarly studies was of a kind that was difficult to obtain elsewhere. The lack of a classical education severely restricted women's ability to join the higher echelons of the literary establishment. In Chapter 1, I showed how Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Emily Brontë struggled with hand-me-down text books and second-rate tutors in order to acquire membership of that exclusive club. However, in addition to denying women access to poetic forms and conventions, this educational disadvantage also limited their knowledge of more esoteric discourses. Lister very quickly perceived that any serious discussion of sexuality was still principally to be found in

ancient texts or embedded in works using the classical languages. Thus a reading list in the back of one of her exercise books, dated February 1823, includes Pliny, Callimachus, Ovid, Homer, Appollonius, Euripides, Lucretius, Propertius, Plato, Horace, Sophocles, Pindar and Eusebius (SH: 7/ML/F/2).

The perils for men of such studies was already the subject of some discussion in Lister's youth. Clara Reeve, in *The Progress of Romance* (1785), attempts to redress the balance for women, whose novel-reading was seen as morally debilitating, by pointing up the questionable contents of young men's education. 'They are taught the History - the Mythology - the morals - of the great Ancients, whom you and all learned men revere.' These books 'of a worse tendency [than women's novels], are put into the hands of the youth of your own [sex], without scruple'. She particularly deplores two writers whom Lister found valuable in her sexual explorations: Lucretius, for applauding indulgence of the passions, and Juvenal, for 'describing such scenes, as ... Romance and Novel-writers of any credit would blush at' (quoted in Flint, 1993: 29).

Such warnings could only serve to alert Lister to possible sites in her continuing search for information about her homosexuality, as her annotations and attempted translations from classical writers indicate. For example, in an 1820-21 exercise book, she discusses 'y<sup>e</sup> vice of y<sup>e</sup> Greeks' in relation to the 'malig[nity] of Herod[otus]' (SH: 7/ML/F/3), and asks if the Persians could, as Plutarch suggests, have learned the vice of the Greeks? And in an 'Addenda on read[ing] Herod[otus]' she investigates pederasty, and asks if 'any light can be drawn fr[om] sacred hist[ory] on the matter' (SH: 7/ML/F/4). Much more apposite to her own experience was the information she derived from 'the Latin parts of

the works of Sir William Jones', the eighteenth-century scholar and latinist, in which she 'read of women being too fond of each other' (Whitbread, 1992: 32).<sup>5</sup>

Lister's exploration of her sexuality through classical literature was not unique. Indeed, it seems that knowledge of particular texts could be used as a covert signal of transgressive sexuality, a way of one lesbian identifying another. Knowledge of these texts helped Lister discover the sexual identity of Miss Pickford, a local woman who had been described to her as 'blue & masculine', and whom Lister believed to be engaged in a sexual relationship with her female companion, Miss Threlfall (Whitbread, 1988: 234). Very early in their acquaintance, Lister tested Pickford out with literary allusions, as recounted in a diary entry for February 1823:

Miss Pickford spoke of the moon being made masculine by some nations ... I smiled & said the moon had tried both sexes, like old Tiresias, but that one could not make such an observation to everyone. Of course she remembered the story? She said yes. I am not quite certain tho', whether she did or not. 'Tis not everyone who would (*vid. Ovid Metamorphoses*) (Whitbread, 1988: 236).

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Tiresias, who is miraculously turned from male to female and back again, is asked by the gods to determine which sex experiences the greater sexual pleasure, and finds that women do (Ovid, 1955: 82). Pickford needs only to admit knowledge of the story without necessarily having read it, to alert Lister to her sexual preferences. The reference also hints at descriptions of woman-to-woman sexuality in the same text. Book IX of the *Metamorphoses*, for example, recounts the story of Iphis, a Cretan princess who is brought up as a boy and falls in love with a woman (Ovid, 1955: 223).

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'too fond' suggests that she interpreted such writings as depicting sexual love between women as an excess, a fault rather than a sin.

Ovid's account of Iphis is sympathetic and analytical. There are, however, descriptions of lesbian relations in other classical texts that focus almost exclusively on the lubricious and obviously Lister had read these too. Indeed, having elicited a confession from Pickford that 'I know I could break [Miss] Threlfall's heart', Lister wryly observed that 'Miss Pickford has read the Sixth Satyr of Juvenal. She understands these matters well enough' (Whitbread, 1988: 268). Juvenal's Satires are full of references to male homosexuality, but here Lister is probably referring to an episode in Satire VI that describes the cavortings of Maura and Tullia, two wild Roman women who engage in vigorous sexual activity with each other (Juvenal, 1998: 43). Pickford's admission that she has read this text is, in Lister's eyes, tantamount to a confession of her lesbian sexuality.

Roy Porter suggests that Enlightenment writers, 'rejecting traditional modes of behaviour, but also traditional courtly forms as well', were more concerned to show that 'Nature was good, and that proper behaviour should seek to realise human nature, rather than deny, fight and conquer it', and 'if Nature was good, then desire, far from being sinful, became desirable' (Porter, 1982: 3-4). Lister seems to have absorbed these notions, although her earnest searching through classical texts does not reflect the often repressive attitudes towards lesbian sexuality constructed by their narratives. She reconceptualizes their depiction of scenes of woman-to-woman eroticism as naturally exuberant and instead directs her disapproval towards 'artificial' attempts to emulate them. When she finally drives Pickford to admit that she shares a bed with her companion, Lister remarks that 'many would censure unqualifiedly but I did not. If it had been done from books & not from nature, the thing would have been different. ... There was no parallel between a

case like this & the Sixth Satire of Juvenal. The one was artificial & inconsistent, the other was the effect of nature & always consistent with itself' (Whitbread, 1988: 273).<sup>6</sup>

The unfavourable influence of books in the lives of women was a subject she had alluded to before. When she first met Pickford, she discussed with her the effect women produced when they 'pronounced words properly, gave plants their botanical names, etc.'. She made it clear that she had always 'regulated my conversation & therefore avoided ... the imputation either of pedantry or conceit'. 'Learned ladies', she told Pickford, had 'no medium in their agreeableness in general. Literature was anything but desirable if it interfered with any of the kindred charities of domestic life' (Whitbread, 1988: 238). This is a position sanctioned by the conduct book writers. Mrs Chapone, recommending that young ladies acquaint themselves through reading with 'some insight into the general history of the world', reassures her delicate readers with the startling observation that their apprehension at this formidable task 'will vanish, when you consider that of near half the globe we have no histories at all;- [and] that, of other parts of it, a few facts only are known to us' (Chapone, 1773: 180). Lister's observation on women and literature might also be seen as a criticism of Pickford whom she considered too mannish for her liking, and perhaps too reminiscent of herself. She believed that she had revealed nothing of her own predilections, 'I am now let into her secret & she forever barred from mine' (Whitbread, 1988: 273), though Lister's habitual costume of black riding-habit and men's boots and greatcoat makes this seem a little unlikely. The contrast between what is natural and what is literary is reiterated on several occasions in her diary. Defending her sexual identity to her lover, Marianna, she 'observed upon my conduct & feelings being

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<sup>6</sup> Lister describes how her friend, Mrs William Priestley, 'thinks me very odd & asked if it was owing to education. I said, no. I had not begun the sort of education she meant till my native character was sufficiently developed' (Whitbread, 1988: 83). In other words, her sexuality was formed without the influence of academic reading.



surely natural to me inasmuch as they were not taught, not fictitious, but instinctive’ (Whitbread, 1988: 297).

This distinction between literature and nature is one that had been rehearsed many times in the eighteenth century. In her novel, *Nature and Art* (1796), for example, Mrs Inchbold attempts to demonstrate that natural education is superior to formal education by taking two brothers and giving one a university education and one an education in the school of life. The latter develops the more moral character (quoted in MacCarthy, 1994: 438-9). This debate had an insistent resonance for women, who were supposedly predisposed to be nature’s vessels. Dr Gregory, in his advice to his daughters, confesses that ‘I am at the greatest loss what to advise you in regard to books’, for ‘I may very probably do you an injury by artificially creating a taste, which, if nature never give it to you, would only serve to embarrass your future conduct. - I do not want to *make* you anything: I want to know what Nature has made you, and to perfect on her plan’ (Gregory, 1801: 47-8). Assumptions about women’s natural susceptibility to the evils of reading are discussed by Kate Flint in *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* (1993), where she suggests that the relationship between the natural and the cultural was ‘central to the entire issue of women’s writing and reading for the next century’ (Flint, 1993: 28).

The Enlightenment ideals that coloured the writings of Mrs Inchbold and Dr Gregory clearly had a strong appeal to Anne Lister in her search for the origins of her transgressive sexual identity. Nevertheless, it is interesting that a woman who spent the greater part of her days in the study or production of literature should be prey to such ambiguity and uneasiness towards it. If life and literature were separate and in conflict then some elaborate negotiations were required to maintain an equilibrium between them. Occasionally Lister abandoned her doubts and acknowledged her debt to literature. On a day when ‘moody thoughts’ crowded in on her, she wrote in her diary: ‘I shall turn to

Urquhart's commentaries on classical learning. O books! books! I owe you much. Ye are my spirit's oil without which, its own friction against itself would wear it out' (Whitbread, 1988: 265-6).

### **Literary Influences on Anne Lister's Diary**

How much did Lister's writing owe to novel-reading? Blodgett suggests that after the 1740s, 'novels of sensibility inspired some readers themselves to undertake passionate explorations of consciousness' and that 'romantic, self-dramatizing expressions of feeling might be added to the diary contents' (Blodgett, 1989: 23). She cites novels like Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747-48) that 'showed its readers that outside the devotional diary a first-person narrator could intensively explore consciousness and vent emotion directly', and 'promoted self-expression and prompted verbal style'. Diarists were thus sometimes led to 'duplicate the rhetoric of fictional characters for acts of self dramatization' (Blodgett, 1989: 35). These observations are particularly interesting in relation to Lister's diary. Lister adopts a distinctive narrative style in her diary, skilfully dramatises events, uses dialogue; her organisation of material is accomplished, and her address is as if to a reader unfamiliar with her life. Lister was born in 1791, and therefore the greater part of her life was lived in the nineteenth century, yet her style, which is often erotic, confessional and, to a certain extent, picaresque, demonstrates the powerful influence of eighteenth-century literature and an attachment to an earlier style of writing, even as she embraced the early nineteenth-century interest in personal psychology and self-analysis.

She often constructs her diary entries as episodes in a sequential narrative, setting out a scene, peopling it with characters, relating actions and closing it nicely with a good phrase, an entrance or an exit (but with a promise of more to come). These episodes are

interspersed with some domestic detail and philosophical musings. The similarity in construction to the mid-eighteenth-century novel is striking. It is clear from Lister's diary that she read these novels even though, in concurrence with received opinion, she ostensibly disapproved of novel-reading.

Clara Reeve in *The Progress of Romance* of 1785 has her young women characters talk of the 'evils' of novel reading: 'The seeds of vice and folly are sown in the heart,- the passions awakened, - false expectations are raised.- A young woman is taught to expect adventures and intrigues ...' (quoted in Flint, 1993: 29). But if Lister paid lip service to the principles embodied here, the listed books at the beginning of this chapter declare her actual practice. She had just finished reading two volumes of the popular novel *Glenarvon* and reported a conversation with her women friends, and lovers, in which they all 'agreed that Lady Caroline Lambe's novel *Glenarvon*, is very talented but a very dangerous sort of book' (Whitbread, 1988: 296). When Lister read the first hundred pages of the romantic novel, *Leontine de Blonheim*, she was so moved, her feelings so awakened, that she cautioned herself not to indulge in 'the fearful rousing, of novel reading' (Whitbread, 1988: 146). This caution did not prevent her from reading in 1824, among other novels, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe, *Anastasis, or Memoirs of a Greek, Written at the Close of the Eighteenth Century* (1819) by Thomas Hope, *Amélie Mansfield* (1803), by Marie-Sophie Cottin, *Paul et Virginie* (1788) by Bernadin de Saint-Pierre and *Julie: ou Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) by one of her favourite writers, Jean-Jacques Rousseau.<sup>7</sup>

The extensive knowledge of the narrative form Lister gained through her reading is evident in the careful literary construction and style of her diary. Women diarists were themselves owed a debt by the novelist Samuel Richardson. The practice of keeping a

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<sup>7</sup> Mention of these novels occurs in Whitbread's transcriptions (Whitbread, 1992: 133, 71, 114, 137).

letter-diary (a daily dated letter that could serve as both diary and intimate correspondence with a particular recipient) was an established practice among eighteenth-century women diary writers, and was adapted by Richardson in *Pamela* (1740-41), and *Clarissa* (1747-8), novels that used both fictional letters and journals in the development of their female subjects and narratives. In their turn, the novels supplied a tradition and form for women's literary interpretation and expression of their subjective experience.<sup>8</sup>

The diary, I suggested in Chapter 1, has been a site for both resistance and accommodation of the negative cultural conditions affecting women over the centuries. In each case, the diary has, by its theoretically private, unpublicized nature, by its ideological ambiguity and by its appearing to be a spontaneous continuing production in the heat of experience, apparently rejected any controlling authorial stance. The popularity of *Pamela*, and subsequently *Clarissa*, gave women's private experience (of their sexuality and sexual relations to the world, for instance) a readily accessible public form and a language of immediacy that would affect the way that women could tell their life stories to themselves. Lister's stylistic approach to diary-writing draws on the example of earlier novels of this kind in which women are represented as shaping their own lives, not with the authority of retrospect, but while in the middle of things themselves. Margaret A. Doody, the editor of the Penguin edition of *Pamela* writes of it, 'the novel itself lacks (ostensibly) the controlling, authoritative and soothing presence of the monarchical author. The real author refuses to appear, calling himself an editor ... The heroine tells her own story, but in that telling she has no final authority' (Richardson, 1985: 306-7). Lister had that authority, and yet the fragmentary nature of the diary allows her to present the appearance, at least, of uncontrolled spontaneity. The following

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<sup>8</sup> Ruth Vanita remarks that the journal of the Ladies of Llangollen was 'modeled, like so many women's journals of this time, on the literary example of the journal of Richardson's *Clarissa*' (Vanita, 1996: 115).

extracts from, respectively, Lister's 1824 diary, and Richardson's *Pamela*, may help to demonstrate the extent to which Lister drew on this tradition:

*Anne Lister's Diary, Thursday 4 November 1824:*

Sat cozily till 9-50, then came up to bed. Mrs Barlow soon followed & came to me at 9-50 & sat with me till 11-55. Behaved very properly all the day tho' evidently making distant love. Kissed her gently several times, particularly saying she now behaved kindly and well & I was satisfied & would never make bad use of it ... She understands me well enough. She knows I am making love & does not look as if it was impossible she could return it. At last, I said she was in the right & not [right] in saying I should not love long whom I did not respect. Right in the first instance, but we were at issue on the point that, if my love was returned, I should not respect the person. Why should I not? If she deserved to be respected for every other thing surely loving me could not sink her in my esteem? ... She looked as if not dissenting nor displeased. 'But,' said I, 'there are those whom I know I could both respect and love. They are not at the world's end but it matters not to give them a local habitation and name. Yet to know only one mind where it is necessary to know two, is nothing.' [Mrs Barlow] often looks at my gold rings & just presses them on my finger.<sup>9</sup> She had done so much tonight. Said I, 'I know you often think of those rings. Perhaps you attach too much importance to them & I too little' (Whitbread, 1992: 40-1).

Extract from *Pamela*:

'This,' said he (and honoured me by kissing my hand) 'is engaging indeed.

And may I hope, that my Pamela's gentle inclination for her persecutor was

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<sup>9</sup> Lister goes on to make clear that she and Marianna Belcombe had exchanged rings as tokens of fidelity.

the strongest motive to her return?' I was silent. I felt myself blush. I looked down. I was afraid I had said too much; not for my heart, but for my interest in *his* heart. Men complain, I have heard, of women's reserves; yet slight them, if they are not reserved. But this *now* wholly good gentleman did not do so by me. On the contrary he encouraged my frankness. 'Why blushes my girl?' said he. 'Why looks she down? Fear not to trust the tenderest secrets of your heart with me, if favourable to me. I do assure you, that I so much value a fervent and unquestionable love in the person I would wish for my wife, that even in the days of courtship, I would not have the least shadow of reserve, where there is no room for doubt, have place on her lips, when she inclines to favour me by a declaration of reciprocal love (Richardson, 1985: 306-7).

Lister is the female subject of her own story and yet the tone she adopts has a masculine ring; her approach to her lover is framed by authoritative pronouncements on her conduct and feelings. In her diary entry, Lister, the suitor, controls the narrative. In Richardson's novel, Pamela narrates, but Richardson's authorial overview robs her of much of her subjectivity and repositions her as the female object of desire. The narratives resulting from the two different positions and approaches, Lister's and Richardson's, are surprisingly similar. Both offer a view of vulnerable femininity that is voyeuristic. Although Richardson allows Pamela to narrate, the reader experiences her through a male gaze. Pamela watches herself being watched and reports fully and faithfully her suitor's (seducer's) observations and questions, so that the reader observes her through his eyes. Her response to her suitor's interest is prescribed by convention; she is silent, blushes and looks down, all of which she reports uncritically. Pamela's problematic position within the text is what Judy Simons describes as a 'dramatic instance of this subject/object split'. Simons notes too the problems that can arise for 'the author of a text who is also its

subject' (Simons, 1990: 15). Yet, in her diary account, Lister's amorous intentions do not have to be mediated through the viewer/reader's masculine gaze. She observes directly her lover's vulnerability and feminine hesitancy and thus avoids the more obvious subject/object split found in *Pamela* and loses some of the piquant voyeurism evoked with such success there. Despite the adopted masculinity of her narrative pose, she does not render her object of desire helpless, nor indeed fully objectify her. Nevertheless, Lister relishes her control of the scene as narrator and subject-writer, employing a style and language very like that so skilfully deployed by Richardson. As a chivalrous paramour, Lister, like Pamela's suitor, urges her case gently but firmly upon a reluctant lover, drawing from her confessions and protestations of love: 'But,' says Lister, 'there are those whom I know I could both respect and love. They are not at the world's end but it matters not to give them a local habitation and name. Yet to know only one mind where it is necessary to know two, is nothing.' 'I do assure you,' says Pamela's lover, 'that I so much value a fervent and unquestionable love in the person I would wish for my wife, that even in the days of courtship, I would not have the least shadow of reserve, where there is no room for doubt, have place on her lips, when she inclines to favour me by a declaration of reciprocal love.' Both Lister and Pamela's suitor are particularly good at reassuring where doubts have arisen: 'I know you often think of those rings. Perhaps you attach too much importance to them & I too little,' Lister declares; and 'Fear not to trust the tenderest secrets of your heart with me', encourages Pamela's lover.

Lister's diary entry, placed alongside Richardson's fiction, seems scarcely to acknowledge the generic differences between them; her style, rather than suggesting the random or spontaneous outpourings of unconsidered daily trivia, is subtle and complex, with tremendous narrative control. Lister's diurnal observations appear both disingenuous and ingenious, at the same time stretching the boundaries of the conventions of diary-

writing, fiction, and authorship. Her depiction of amorous adventures is, however, noticeably less occluded and more explicit than Richardson's. Could she therefore have also drawn on erotic or pornographic works in her diary accounts? Would she have had access to such material? She recounts that as a child she mixed in wild circles<sup>10</sup> and, as I have shown, she read extensively in the classics, which describe explicitly and often voyeuristically a multitude of sexual activities. She read French and later paid many visits to the continent where it would not have been difficult to get hold of racy manuscript novels, erotic works circulated in manuscript form to avoid the strict censorship laws of France. In a diary entry for 15 October, 1824, when she was staying in a Paris boarding-house, Lister gleefully describes her lover, Mrs Barlow, lending her a 'little book the gentleman had left here for her, "'Voyage a Plombières"', p. 126, where is the story of one woman intriguing with another' (Whitbread, 1992: 33).<sup>11</sup> Similarly, she would have had access to French whore novels, a type of narrative that purportedly showed the sad results of unchaste actions, but which was more often an excuse for pornographic writing. John Cleland's 1748 *Fanny Hill or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, described by one of its recent editors as 'a mocking parody of the warning moralism as shown in Defoe's novels and Hogarth's engravings' (Cleland, 1985: 17), is probably derived from a whore novel. Lister may have been familiar with contemporary works of this kind. Her reports of sexual encounters in her diary draw on a tradition of erotica, particularly as discovered in the eighteenth-century novel. Her narration of sexual adventures is formulaic: a long titillating introduction, an overheated central action and a cliff-hanging conclusion. It is as though she were writing in serial form (which she was, of course, though the ability to

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<sup>10</sup> Lister writes '... I was a great pickle. 'scaped my maid & got away among the work people. When my mother thought I was safe, I was running out in the evening. Saw curious scenes, bad women etc ...' (Whitbread, 1992: 2).

<sup>11</sup> Whitbread believes this book to be *Les Nymphes de Plombières, ou Relation Veridique des Fetes Curieuses qui viennent de se donner dans ces Bains. Anecdotes Historique Tirée du Journal de la Ville*. Paris, 1798 (Whitbread, 1992: 44n).



structure one's daily narrative so as to leave *oneself* hanging on the edge is surely a remarkable accomplishment). She uses a formal structure and narrative style similar to that employed in erotic texts when she relates in her diary, often in intimate personal detail, sexual liaisons between herself and other women. A comparison of extracts from *Fanny Hill* and Lister's Paris diary will clarify my argument that Lister's erotic style had similarities to Cleland's.

*Anne Lister's Diary, Thursday 11 Nov. 1824:*

[Mrs Barlow] jumped on the window seat to see if it rained. I locked the door as usual, then lifted her down and placed her on my knee. By & by she said, 'Is the door fast?' I, forgetting, got up to see, then took her on my knee again & there she sat till four & threequarters, when Mlle de Sans sent to ask if I could receive. [I] told the maid I was sorry, I could not, I had got so bad a headache. The fact was I was heated & in a state not fit to see anyone. I had kissed & pressed Mrs Barlow on my knee till I had a complete fit of passion. My knees & thighs shook, my breathing & everything told her what was the matter. She said she did me no good. I said it was a little headache & I should go to sleep. I then leaned on her bosom &, pretending to sleep, kept pottering about & rubbing the surface of her queer.<sup>12</sup> Then made several gentle efforts to put my hand up her petticoats which, however, she prevented. But she so crossed her legs & leaned against me that I put my hand over & grubbled her on the outside of her petticoats till she was evidently a little excited ... (Whitbread, 1992: 47).

Extract from *Fanny Hill*:

No sooner then was this precious substitute of my mistress's lain down, but she, who was never out of her way when any occasion of lewdness presented

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<sup>12</sup> Lister uses the word 'queer' or 'quere' for female genitalia.

itself, turned to me, embraced and kissed me with great eagerness. This was new, this was odd; but imputing it to nothing but pure kindness, which, for aught I knew, it might be the London way to express in that manner, I was determined not to be behindhand with her and returned her the kiss and embrace with all the fervour that perfect innocence knew. Encouraged by this, her hands became extremely free and wandered over my whole body, with touches, squeezes, pressures that rather warmed and surprised me with their novelty than they either shocked or alarmed me. ...

... But not contented with these outer posts, she now attempts the main spot, and began to twitch, to insinuate, and at length to force an introduction of a finger into the quick itself, in such a manner that, had she not proceeded by insensible gradations that enflamed me beyond the power of modesty ... I should have jumped out of bed ... (Cleland, 1985: 48-9)

The passage from *Fanny Hill* describes Fanny's seduction (for the purpose of familiarising her with carnal embraces rather than self-gratification, apparently) by a female brothel keeper. It is almost as if Cleland has written the script for Mrs Barlow, whose demeanour, like Fanny's, is represented by Lister as a curious mixture of decorum and ill-concealed lust. The reader is invited to speculate on Fanny's and Mrs Barlow's innocence and to look on as the subject (or, in Lister's case, the subject-writer) exploits that ambiguity. Lister, like the brothel-keeper who companionably lies down beside Fanny, casts herself in the mould of the disreputable but experienced old seducer who arouses unknown passions in her innocent victim by the old ruse of 'pretending to sleep'. The detail of the seduction scenes, too, is remarkably similar. Lister takes Mrs Barlow on her knee before 'grubbling' (fondling) her 'queer' through her clothes, and trying, unsuccessfully at this stage, to put her hand up her petticoats; Fanny's 'mistress' caresses

her body freely with 'touches, squeezes, pressures' before she 'attempts the main spot'. Both Mrs Barlow and Fanny are portrayed by the respective narrators as moved by these advances. Mrs Barlow resists the hand up the skirt but crosses her legs and leans against Lister 'evidently a little excited'. Fanny might have 'jumped out of bed' had she not been 'enflamed beyond the power of modesty'.

Lister constructs the scene with Mrs Barlow in the style of the erotic novelist by providing an account carefully structured to be as titillating to the reader as possible. While Cleland's fiction is designed to offer the maximum voyeuristic value, with Fanny, as fictional narrator and subject, providing a vehicle for the male author, Lister is not herself free of a curiously voyeuristic auto-eroticism. What *was* her motive in producing these steamy episodes? Unlike Richardson and Cleland, who imply that their heroines, Pamela and Fanny, control the narrative, Lister tries to avoid the subject/object division by keeping the breeches part for herself and the power in her own hands, so to speak, making no attempt to disguise her authority.

Lister could have come across any number of novels and novellas which feature women in breeches (whether figurative or not) who step outside the boundaries of expected sexuality and gender roles. Many were written by women, and Henry Fielding's pamphlet, *The Female Husband* (1746), provided a misogynist commentary on these texts. Charlotte Cibber Charke's, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke* (1755) described her life on and off the stage as a cross-dresser. An anonymous story, *The Female Soldier* (1750), tells of Hannah Snell, who followed her sailor husband to war disguised as a man, only to find herself the love-object of several women. Snell's relationships with her female admirers are presented in a favourable light, and conclude with an implied marriage between Snell and a young woman.<sup>13</sup> During the same period, a

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<sup>13</sup> Fielding's pamphlet, Charke and Snell are discussed in detail in Donoghue, 1993: 73-100.

famous courtesan, Con Phillips, published *An Apology* (1748), cataloguing her affairs and marriages, and Viscountess Vane either wrote, or inspired, the story of her scandalous life, which she described as a little lax ‘in the point of prudentials’ (quoted in Todd, 1989: 128), that was inserted into Smollett’s 1751 novel, *Peregrine Pickle*. Laetitia Pilkington used her *Memoirs* (1748-54) for financial gain beyond sales of the book, by threatening to expose the sexual adventures of men and women of her acquaintance in the next edition unless they subscribed to her volumes, a kiss-and-tell practice in advance of its time. The brief fame of all these women served principally as a foil to the advancing myth of the bourgeois angel, inspiring a prayer from Richardson: ‘Mrs Pilkington, Constantia Phillips, Lady V - ... what a set of Wretches, wishing to perpetuate their infamy ... From the same injur’d, disgraced, profaned Sex, let us be favoured with the Antidote to these women’s Poison!’ (quoted in Todd, 1989: 131). Lister’s diary style is often reminiscent of their swashbuckling attitudes and frank narratives, simultaneously deplored and plagiarized by male authors.

Popular literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century offered models not only of erotic relationships between women, but also of women struggling against convention. In Eliza Haywood’s *The Double Marriage: or, The Fatal Release* (1726), a young woman, Alathia, marries her lover, in secret, against the wishes of their fathers. When her secret husband fails to make contact with her after the marriage, Alathia disguises herself as a man and searches him out, only to find that he has bigamously married someone else. On discovering his treachery she ‘draws her Sword, and plunges it hastily into her Breast ... With so much Violence she struck the Blow, that [her husband] presently in attempting to draw the fatal Weapon forth, perceiv’d it could not be done without the Life-Blood issuing with it’ (Haywood, 1995: 140). As well as reversing chivalric traditions, this salutary scene demonstrates how female passivity can be turned

around by a pair of good breeches and a weapon to hand. Although Alatheia stabs herself rather than her husband, such a death, unlike the suicidal methods of poisoning or drowning usually preferred by fictional heroines, suggests heroism rather than victimhood. The swashbuckling masculinity of this passage resonates in two episodes recounted by Lister which illustrate the points of contact between her reading and her construction of herself as subject of her own narrative.

The first is an account of her reading. In 1808, Lister wrote enthusiastically to her friend Eliza Raine of a book about revolutionary Paris, 'Redhead Yorke's tours in France in two octavo volumes a very good publication'. She was impressed by Yorke's account of taking breakfast with a beautiful young woman of the Revolution, for 'the first things which he saw on entering her room were a pike a dagger a sabre a brace of pistols on the floor about a hundred volumes and pamphlets on her table'. She quoted admiringly a passage showing that the bold Parisian had 'headed a body of Pikemen against the king on the memorable 10th of August and was so distinguished for her bravery and presence of mind' (SH: 7/ML/A/10).

The second episode was written in 1809, when Lister was eighteen. She recounts in her diary how she defended her household from supposed attack:

About 1/2 past [midnight] when Sam was in bed and I was just getting in, my mother came in violent agitation to tell us that there was a man in the garret ... I with nothing on but my night jacket over my Shift ... took the pistols loadened with ball which were ready under my pillow & a sword ... he took the candle ... (Liddington, 1994: 27).

The event is described in terms very reminiscent of the extract from Yorke that Lister so admired. The fact that the intruder turned out to be a servant's boyfriend who was quickly despatched back to the kitchen does nothing to detract from her self-construction as hero

of the event. Her father was away and Lister, at least in her literary reconstruction, emphasizes her unfeminine readiness to defend the young and weak (her brother and mother), even to the extent of sleeping with loaded pistols beneath her pillow, presumably a very dangerous procedure in the days before reliable safety catches. The sword adds a touch of glamour and may in reality have formed part of Lister's masculine accoutrements. The whole entry reads like a pastiche of the extract from 'Yorke's tours' that she quotes in her letter to Raine. It has become a literary event espousing literary values, and is self-conscious, daring, and even titillating.

### **Dialogue in Anne Lister's Diaries**

Lister was accomplished in the re-construction of events and action, but how did she deal with speech? The transformation of real-life speech or conversation into spoken dialogue is a complex process, and while one of the ways that realist literature is identified is by the presence of conversation in the text, its representation is highly stylized. Lennard J. Davis, in *Resisting Novels*, claims that eighteenth-century novelists 'invented conversation' and that 'after novelists invented conversation, readers strove to include conversation in their own lives ... Obviously people talked to each other [before 1700]. But conversation in its inscribed form as a literary phenomenon had to grow to acceptance during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries'. Davis notes 'how sets of signs and arrangements on the page, which actually look and sound almost nothing like real conversations, got to be accepted as the rule', and 'how ... readers then tended to think of their own natural speech as a replica of that printed form'. He suggests that 'the shift from the oral paradigm of conversation to the printed paradigm ... occurred between 1650 and 1750' and that the novel was the focus for this shift (Davis, 1987: 162-3).

Lister's diary demonstrates the transformation of what were, probably, real-life verbal exchanges, with all their hesitations, irrelevancies, interruptions, overlaps, emphases and non-verbal signs, into literary dialogue. She uses both direct and indirect speech, usually signalling indirect speech with a 'said she' or a 'so saying', or a similar tag. For example, a disagreement about household expenditure with her partner, Anne Walker, on 4 January 1836, in which it is clear that there was a heated exchange of opinions, is reported in this indirect manner:

*A began crying & said I seemed to think she caused all the expense    wished I had told her before etc. etc.    I had put stable expenses including ... Frank & Georges wages etc. etc. at about (over rather than under the reality I said) two hundred & fifty a year    she said she thought I had reckoned fifty pounds & per horse    yes said I but that did not include servants wages etc. (SH: 7/ML/E).*

The rapidity of their exchange is emphasized by the shorthand way in which Lister omits 'A[nne] said' before '*wished I had told her ...*' and '*I had put ...*' and by the skilful enclosure of her aside in parenthesis within Walker's speech.

Direct speech is generally, although not invariably, enclosed by double quotation marks, which Lister also liberally employs for quotations from letters, books or other written texts. It does not appear quite so often as indirect speech in the diary which might be expected from a retrospective account, but its presence is surprisingly frequent, once again highlighting Lister's interest in novelistic forms of conversation. In the following diary entry for 17 January 1836, she uses direct speech only once, but to great dramatic effect. The full entry is long and relates in great detail a contretemps between Lister and Walker about whether they should travel to church in the ancient yellow Lister family carriage, which Walker finds too ugly and uncomfortable. When at last they set out in this

antique vehicle they are not speaking to each other: '*... not a word passed in the carriage till after waiting at the school door twenty minutes reading she rejoined me & put out her hand saying "will it be accepted" yes certainly but we will not talk about it now as we are going to church ...*' (SH: 7/ML/E). Walker's speech is not only enclosed in double quotation marks but is also underlined, emphasizing its significance, for it is an apology and Walker is the first to break the silence. Lister's reply, by contrast, slips into the body of the text without emphasis for it is simply a passage between the apology and the report of Lister's internal musings which follows directly: '*~ my mind had been full of her & getting rid of her.*' The positioning of the speech marks is then doubly significant for they signal Walker's defeat and a kind of menace in Lister's ascendancy.

Direct speech is also used to convey the urgency or immediacy of a scene, as in this diary entry of 6 February 1832 in which Lister is accused by her friend, Vere Hobart (whom Lister perceived as a potential sexual and life partner), of harbouring inappropriate amorous aspirations and of discouraging her marriage. Hobart's speech opens the extract:

*"but if I did marry [him] you would rather see me unhappy than happy" I repelled the ungenerous suspicion ... she supposed now the veil was withdrawn well said I tis yourself who have withdrawn it "I have often done it before & you never took it so seriously" "you will not have to do it again there is no fear now you are glad it is enough for you to say & I am profoundly grateful" & I left the room ...* (SH: 7/ML/E).

Here is a sophisticated mixture of direct and indirect speech and action, that creates a novelistic impression of conflict and heightened passions and anticipates a sequel. Lister presents differing speech modes and points of view without breaking into the flow of her narrative, and offers interpretation and analysis of events through her commentary. Rather



than surreptitiously gaining an entry into the solipsistic world of the diarist, the reader is openly invited to participate in dramatic interchanges between clearly distinguished characters. This invitation helps Lister, as both subject-writer and as reader of her diary, to redirect past events, reshape them and re-produce her self. Another example, of the novelistic manner with which Lister represents conversation is found in her reported exchange with Mrs Barlow<sup>14</sup> about Lister's earlier lovers, Marianna Belcombe and Eliza Raine. Lister, of course, knows the story and does not *have* to retell it to herself in any form.

Saturday 22 Jan. 1825.

We lay quiet this morning. She came to me very affectionately, saying it was so delightful to her to lie this quietly in the arms of those we love. We then talked a little of Eliza Raine & of her dislike to Marianna & my engagement. Said, as I had done once or twice before, that Lou [Marianna's sister] told me Marianna was worldly. Mrs Barlow at last confessed that she thought she was but perhaps she was wicked in owning this was her opinion, which she had always refused giving me before. She [Marianna] had two strings to her bow & she had great influence with me - she would change me when I was with her. I said no. 'Ah,' she replied, 'that she may love you and were she hanging on your bosom you know not what she could do. She would not object to me. You might amuse yourself with me. That would not hurt her cause.' Here I saw Mrs Barlow was affected. The tears fell fast. I was affectionate - said love was the strongest tie - I should always love [her]. 'But,' said she, 'you can only leave me as you found me.' I said I really believed she loved me & perhaps none would

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<sup>14</sup> Mrs Maria Barlow became Lister's lover during her stay in Paris, 1824-5. See Appendix 1, 'Who's Who in Anne Lister's Diary'.

love me better. 'No,' said she, 'I do not think they ever will. I love you for yourself alone, your mind and heart, not your person or situation at all.' ... My heart half ached for her ... Said I ... 'As we cannot go & be married, what should we do?' 'Oh,' said she, telling me she quoted from Cowper, 'it is pairing time anticipated'(Whitbread, 1992: 75-6).<sup>15</sup>

The conclusion of this day's entry with an apt quotation from Mrs Barlow which frames and closes the narrative, and the formal reproduction and condensation of a conversation that must have been full of ramblings, hesitations, interruptions, overlappings and visual and physical signals, indicates the extent to which Lister consciously constructed her writing as literature. She begins with an arresting and scene-setting sentence, then develops this opening with an explanatory sentence. Next she gives a summary of a conversation between herself and Mrs Barlow about Marianna, before Mrs Barlow speaks: "Ah, that she may love you and were she hanging on your bosom you know not what she could do." Lister reports her own replies indirectly: 'I said I really believed she loved me & perhaps none would love me better.' This allows her both to develop Mrs Barlow's character, and to carry the narrative forward. Mrs Barlow's words are supposedly reported verbatim, while Lister's apparently have the advantage of afterthought. In fact, both are equally contrived. So polished is the structure, development and style of Lister's diary-writing that it nearly reaches over the gap that has been perceived to exist between a work of literature as accepted within the canon and non-canonical writing. Judith Sloman has defined the former as 'the work designed as a completed whole and readily detachable from the author's personal life and motives in writing it' (quoted in Blodgett, 1989: 7). Clearly a diary cannot be 'detachable' from the

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<sup>15</sup> The punctuation marks here have been introduced by Whitbread into her transcription of encoded text for the convenience of the general reader and may not be entirely accurate as to the original.

author's life or motives (it is questionable how far any piece of writing can), but the element of design and premeditation in her diary suggests that Lister had some concept of 'a completed whole'. Indeed, she had defined the parameters of her literary project: 'The general rummage among my letters & papers takes a great deal of time & puts me sadly out of my way - but as I have never had my things fairly set to rights as they ought to be, 'tis high time to begin if I mean to get it done in my lifetime' (Whitbread, 1988: 17). No doubt the hyperbole here is intentionally humorous, and yet for a twenty-six-year old woman there is a prescient gravity about the tone. What was it she was to 'get done': her life-story, her literary self-construction? Would these be completed by Lister's death? Could they be called finished, or 'done' when her collection of writings encompassed her entire life and self-construction and were separated from her by surviving beyond her physical self? These questions highlight the difficulties that arise when the criteria for recognizing a literary event are embedded in cultural traditions which subordinate particular groups or classes of writing.

Lister is not the only female diarist whose interpretation of daily life was mediated through complex literary technique. Elizabeth Raper (d.1778), the daughter of a Hertfordshire farmer, for example, makes sophisticated use of reported speech to frame narrative in her diary. Her entry of 16th March 1761 recounts the progress of a suitor in securing his desired terms from her mother and father:

The sum of conversation was that he seemed vastly surprised that so rich as Father and Mother were reputed to be, they could not give me in present about 200 a year, though they might not have ready money to spare. This, I say, astonished him greatly (and Mother dwelt on it) without considering that he had not any the least right to demand it, unless he thought everything due to his *personal* merit. However, as it could not be, it could not, and all that. Mother

dropped something about a coach and that it was impossible for me in the Eye of the *World* to marry without one. *Supposing* we ourselves were willing and contented to live without any shew, yet common convenience in appearance must not be given up, and it was a sad thing to be straitened. He said that was by no means his scheme, and that he could not think of marrying with only his present preferments, without any fortune from the woman in present, for that he could not maintain a wife and family. Mother says he seemed vastly vexed, and said he *wished* he had never spoken at all ... (quoted in Blodgett, 1992: 189).

Raper's style, while carefully managed, is reactive and reflective and provides a useful comparison with Lister's narrative approach. In this short extract, she reproduces a conversation between herself, her suitor and her mother. Direct speech is untagged, and the narrative follows each character as if in a chronological reconstruction. The problem with this approach is that there is little characterization to carry the narrative forward and infrequent opportunities for interpretation or analysis. The result is the rather breathless, confused account of an observer rather than a participant in the event, although it has a slightly wry if ingenuous undercurrent. Elizabeth Raper writes with the kind of helpless charm of a Pamela, though, unlike Pamela, she has charge of her own literary narrative. Lister, on the other hand, did not let chronological veracity dictate the construction of her narrative, often preferring to foreground literary values. Her approach, in contrast to Raper's, is what might be called pro-active and productive, and the values it espouses indicate the strong connections she made between her diary production, authorship and literary self-construction. Even within the short passage of 1825, reproduced above, pace and style vary and character is carefully delineated. The quietness of the opening is reinforced by the repetition of 'quiet' and 'quietly', by the simple grammatical construction, and by the gentle introduction of the contentious subject of Marianna

Belcombe and Eliza Raine. The pace changes quickly as Mrs Barlow begins to speak. The language and tone she and Lister use is elevated and romantic, rather than simply functional like Raper's; Mrs Barlow's tears are both dramatic and sentimental; the characterization pushes the narrative on towards closure in that apt quotation. While Lister still adopts a masculine-like role as subject-writer, watching and controlling Mrs Barlow's hopeless attachment with rather bland reassurances, the problems associated with this guise are nicely revealed in the declaration, 'As we cannot go & get married, what should we do?' Unlike Elizabeth Raper, in the extract above, however, Lister takes command of the narrative and places her self at its centre.

### Conclusion

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the place of reading in women's lives was carefully scrutinised, partly in relation to the debates about nature and culture that I have outlined above, but partly in response to the access it gave women to ideas and information they had previously been denied. The price of books was comparatively high, but the circulating libraries, first founded in the 1740s, attracted large numbers of women readers (Tuchman and Fortin, 1989: 27). Anne Lister was herself a regular visitor to the library in Halifax, even using it for amorous trysts (Whitbread, 1988: 77).<sup>16</sup>

Contemporary critics of women's reading may have been alarmed by its paradoxical nature. While the act of reading itself was usually private, its subject-matter was public. This was a potentially dangerous combination, for it offered women autonomy of mind through a self-sufficient occupation, and the possibility of entering, albeit quietly, a public sphere beyond the domestic. Some commentators concentrated their attention on

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<sup>16</sup> For example, Lister meets her paramour, Miss Browne, 'at the door' of the library (Whitbread, 1988: 59).

the pitfalls of privacy, worrying about readers identifying with the text to the extent of being corrupted by it. The Reverend Vicesimus Knox, in his essay 'On Novel Reading' (1800) despaired that 'the moral view is rarely regarded by youthful and inexperienced readers, who naturally pay the chief attention to the lively descriptions of love, and its effects' (quoted in Flint, 1993: 28). At the same time, women continued to be denied opportunities to study in the higher branches of the arts and sciences, limiting their reading to domestic forms, like the romance novel, that were regarded as second-rate. Lister herself did not only read for educational purposes, but even while, like Knox, ostensibly disapproving of such pursuits, she evidently read for pleasure novels and, as her exciting purchase in Paris suggests, erotica.

I have argued in this chapter that reading formed a significant element in the construction of Lister's literary self-narrative. First, it influenced her daily schedule. An activity that takes up so much of a diurnal routine has a shaping effect upon that routine, as well as being shaped by it. The strict timetable of study and reading she imposed upon herself was part of her self-narrative, the story she told herself about herself. But it was clearly important to Lister not only to read, but also to see *herself* as someone who read, and to *be seen* as someone who read by family, friends and acquaintances. Here again is that potent mixture of private activity calculatedly if carefully made public that keeps cropping up in Lister's life. Despite her rather peevish injunction to Miss Pickford to avoid making her scholarly inclinations public, Lister did little to disguise her own studious pursuits, beyond perhaps tempering her use of academic phraseology in front of uneducated potential lovers. She even built a tower on to Shibden Hall to act as her library and study, a very visible declaration of the importance of reading in her life.

Second, reading works of scholarship and practical manuals provided Lister with an entry into the privileges usually accorded to middle- and upper-class men. Her burning

desire to raise the family fortunes, in terms of both wealth and status, required her to have a strong hold on the mechanisms and the language of power. These she wove into the fabric of her life through several stratagems. With an eye to a long sojourn at Shibden Hall she prepared herself for the practical management of income and estate by reading farming texts, studying accounting, and training herself in legal, philosophical and medical matters. The activity itself, whether or not she learned anything from it, was useful if it impressed her uncle. In order to meet the necessary academic elevation for a literary career (an ambition I identified in Chapter 1), she studied classical languages and read extensively in both ancient and recent classic texts. The acquisition of this scholarly learning separated her in public perception from her immediate and rather feckless family, and gave her a certain cachet among female acquaintances like, for example, Lady Crawford, Eliza Raine's aunt, who may not otherwise have been interested in the poor niece of a Halifax landowner.

Reading played a third vital role in Lister's life, in the construction of her sexuality. Through her strategically diplomatic yet suggestive correspondence with Eliza Raine, and her detailed explorations of classical texts, she sought not only to understand, justify and reinforce her lesbian identity, but also to utilize her reading to establish a sense of community and history around that identity. Lister employed and subverted advice manual forms to convey complex meanings to Raine, and these in turn (during the early part of their relationship, at least) she discovered in Raine's letters. Much of the to-ing and fro-ing between Lister and Miss Pickford revolves around their reading, their knowledge of certain texts, or of the existence of certain texts, for Lister was by no means sure that Miss Pickford had actually *read* the texts. It was enough of a signal for her to appear to have read them. Reading as an abstract concept, the *idea* of reading and of themselves as readers, was for these two women as important as the *act* of reading in

establishing their social selves. They constructed themselves as the kind of women who read, with all the positive and problematic connotations that conjured up: scholarliness, or even cleverness, and originality, on the one hand; on the other, mannishness and unnaturalness (though the first of these epithets would not necessarily have been construed as negative by Lister).

Finally, Lister's conscious espousal of literary values, derived in great part from her wide range of reading, encouraged and enabled her to construct her own self-narrative, and in the process, helped to shape that narrative. The sequential episodic form Lister so often adopted as she told herself her own story elided with the construction of her daily life and with her narrative of her social, sexual and individual identity. The two processes of production and reception were so intertwined that ultimately Lister was engaged in a kind of reading, or a literary analysis and interpretation, of her own life.



### Chapter 3: ‘Peculiar writing’: The Encrypted Author

‘02o2993p7∩!o! 4?δ2=~\4∩θ~ [*had a very good kiss last night*]' (SH: 7/ML/E).

This encrypted remark, opening Anne Lister's diary entry for 11 November 1816, refers to her sexual encounter with Anne Belcombe, Marianna's sister. 'Kiss' is Lister's euphemism, or code-word, for orgasm (or bringing a lover to orgasm), so that this reference is, in a sense, doubly encrypted. It is a mere fragment of the encrypted text, however, for, according to Jill Liddington's calculations, about one sixth of the diary employs a code or cipher (Liddington, 1998: xiii). Lister called this her 'crypt hand' (Whitbread, 1988: 142).

Cryptography, the production of text that is intelligible only to those who hold the key, is an ancient practice. In its widest sense, it includes the use of concealed messages, secret languages, ciphers and codes. Examples of secret codes can be found in sacred Jewish writing, including the Bible, and in the communications of Spartan field generals. Julius Caesar used a cipher system commonly known as the Caesar shift (Laffin, 1964: 15). As I show later in this chapter, cryptography was in use in private diaries from their emergence in the late sixteenth century. Its simplest form is the secret message which is written in plain, or clear, text (as the message to be encrypted is called by cryptologists) but disguised by invisible ink, for example, or hidden within another text. Ciphers are

based on a system that transposes each letter of the clear message to a different position according to a prearranged pattern, or the substitution of letters of clear text by other letters, numerical figures or symbols. The Julius Caesar shift used a simple substitution system of advancing each letter three places; thus *a* became *c*, *b* became *d*, *c* became *e*, and so on. The signs of the zodiac were commonly used in substitution ciphers in the medieval period (Wrixon, 1989: 26). More complex cipher systems mix substitution and transposition alphabets. Nevertheless, the most elaborate of these may often be quite easily deciphered for it will usually reproduce the occurrence of normal letter frequencies; *e*, for example, is the letter most often used in clear text and can therefore be identified in enciphered text as the letter or symbol that most frequently appears.

Codes are more difficult to crack, but easier to use. There is no logical system underlying their production and a key or codebook is required to read them. In a code a prearranged word may replace part or all of the entire clear text. Normal letter frequencies cannot therefore be discovered by the decoder. Once the key is learned, it does not change, and therefore may be written and read fluently and easily, but the key itself must be kept secret. Codes are less flexible than ciphers since, unless they are extraordinarily elaborate (and therefore also very cumbersome), their vocabulary is limited. They are most effective in simple communications. A substitution or transposition cipher, on the other hand, employs the same vocabulary as its clear text equivalent, and is therefore more suitable for longer or more sophisticated literary projects. As I demonstrate here, Lister started out with an unsophisticated cryptographic device and progressed to a more complex substitution cipher.

What purpose is served by encoding a substantial part of a private diary? Lister was careful to prevent casual access to hers, although, apparently paradoxically, she issued the key to the code to a number of her lovers. Why, then, did she employ a cipher? How did

the crypt hand affect her literary production of a self-narrative? In Chapter 1, I suggested that Lister's diurnal literary record interplayed with the events of her daily life and that her writing practice significantly affected her experience of those events. Here, I examine the conditions in which Lister produced her encrypted writings, discuss their form and content, and question her motives for employing her crypt hand. How did she reach the decision to encrypt part of this narrative and what were the criteria that informed her selection? Which facets of her self-narrative does she encrypt? Again, are there any shifts or developments to be discerned in, for example, style and content, between encrypted and unencrypted text? Just as the writing of the diary produced unexpected effects, so an examination of Lister's encrypted text indicates that there is movement between the practice itself and what it was possible to produce. I argue that the cipher extended the parameters of literary possibility and allowed Lister to engage in a remarkable literary experiment. This chapter, then, explores in detail the crypt hand, its functions and effects.

### Codes in diaries

Codes and ciphers have been used in diaries since their inception. Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) famously used shorthand in the six volumes of his diary. Lord Braybooke, the editor of the first published edition of Pepys's diary of 1825, wrote that 'the writer made no scruple of committing his most secret thoughts to paper, encouraged no doubt by the confidence which he derived from the use of short-hand' (Pepys, 1997: 2). Blodgett points out that many women acquired shorthand as a means of taking notes on sermons, and were thus able to employ it in their private diaries. Elizabeth Raper, in the mid-eighteenth century, records in cipher her flirtations and love-making, and Elizabeth Wynne (1779-1857) kept her diary partly in a simple code in which the last letter of each word was

transposed to the beginning of the next, interspersed with misleading capitals, purportedly to conceal her love-life from her parents (Blodgett, 1989: 58). In the late nineteenth century, Beatrix Potter (1866-1943) kept her entire journal in an elaborate code, which was cracked by Leslie Linder in 1958.

Lister's crypt hand alphabet and Potter's code-alphabet have a number of interesting similarities, suggesting that these diarists were prompted by some common procedures, expectations and purposes to encode their entries. Potter, described by Blodgett as 'circumspect' in her diary (Blodgett, 1989: 59), took no chances with the possibility of its being discovered by her parents with whom she lived until she was fifty, and only infrequently reveals her stronger emotions, despite her use of cipher. In this respect she clearly does not resemble Lister. However, both diarists substitute a number of numerical figures for letters, both use letters from the Greek alphabet, and their invented symbols are in several cases alike. After the first few sheets of writing, Potter ceased to distinguish upper from lower case letters, which she had done initially by placing a line under each capital, and from then on, like Lister, she 'seldom indicated where one paragraph ended and the next began, as her writing was practically continuous' (Potter, 1966: xxvii). As they gained fluency in their ciphers, both diarists wrote in an increasingly small hand, cramming hundreds of words to a page. Like Lister, Potter sometimes (perhaps frequently) wrote from notes or drafts (Potter, 1966: xxviii). These points are illustrated by an extract from her 1894 journal, which also offers a tentative allusion to the question of readership: 'I wrote this much, soon after I came home, but being busy, laid it aside and can now only piece out from a rough note, which I am sorry for, for a diary, however private, brings back distinctly the memory of what in this case seemed like a most pleasant dream' (Potter, 1966: 319).

Lister's encoded diary, then, is not exceptional in itself, even to the choice of symbols, the running-together of words and phrases, and the writing-up from drafts or notes. It forms part of a continuum of encoded writings, produced by both men and women diarists, follows common procedures with similar motives and has perhaps comparable expectations of readership.

### The crypt hand alphabet

In its early days, Lister's crypt hand began as a simple cipher in which letters from the Greek alphabet were substituted phonetically for English letters, *τuesday* for Tuesday, for example. Some of Lister's earliest diary entries in this crude cipher record her daily studies, as in this entry of 1806: 'Συνδαι Noon [Sunday Noon] - November 2<sup>d</sup> 1806', this of 1808: 'Συνδαι Feb<sup>ry</sup> 22 *μονινη εαρη* [Sunday February 22 morning early]', or this of the same year which introduces one of her own idiosyncratic symbols, – for *m*:

'Wednesday 25th May *βεγαν* 10 *κλοκ* – *ανε* [began 10 clock mane or main]' (SH: 7/ML/E/26). Lister was at the time assiduously studying the classics under the direction of her tutor, the Rev. Samuel Knight, and it is not therefore surprising to find her also experimenting with concealed messages in Latin. The single word 'Felix [happy]' is appended to several entries during a fortnight in the summer of 1808 when Eliza Raine stayed with her: Saturday 23rd July has the added detail 'Felix 8 o'clock'. This is echoed by an entry later in that year, again when Raine was a visitor: 'Felix afternoon' (SH: 7/ML/E/26). In the light of the explicitly erotic nature of much of Lister's later diary, it seems reasonable to speculate that these entries refer to love-making with Eliza Raine. The use of Latin excluded only a small community of potential readers, schoolfriends, servants and probably some family members, but it perhaps reinforced in Lister a feeling

of cleverness. Greek and Latin were not usually on the curriculum at girls' schools in the early nineteenth century and Manor School, York, was no exception. Lister learned it at home through private tuition after she left school. A word like 'felix' would therefore have had a special significance. Used regularly, it became a code-word for aspects of the two young women's relationship, but also conveyed their separation and difference from their social circle. Lister's ability to employ in her diary and letters what to most women would have been esoteric ancient languages was important to her self-production. Because of the status attached to knowledge of the classics her singularity in this respect rendered her educational achievements superior to those of most girls of her social circle. As I have shown, Lister's appearance caused her to be noticed early on as 'an original' (SH: 7/ML/E/26), attentions that were perhaps not so welcome, however fine a gloss she placed on them, as the kind of admiration attached to a display of learning. It seems unlikely that Raine would have had the opportunity to learn classical languages. She makes no allusion to it in her letters or diary. It is therefore probable that Lister was the instigator of the concealed messages and cipher and taught Raine the Greek alphabet and a few Latin words in the process.

The more elaborate crypt hand had its inception round about 1808 as Lister and Raine refined their crypt alphabet by replacing English letters with Greek letters that were *not* equivalents, as in  $\theta$  for *h*, or  $\delta$  for *l*; by substituting numerical figures for all the vowels and for several consonants, as in 2 for *a*, 3 for *e*, 4 for *i* and *j*, 5 for *o*, 6 for *u*, 8 for *w*, and 9 for *z*, and by the use of punctuation marks for repeated vowels or consonants, as, for example, ? for *ss*, ; for *ee*, ! for *oo*, : for *ll*. Thus 8! $\delta$  spelled *wool*. Repeated letters were also indicated by a dot or line above or below the letter, or by a line through the letter. Other symbols were introduced for single and multiple letters,  $\nabla$  for *ch*, for instance.

Upper case letters often had a different derivation from the lower, as in the Greek capital, *Π* for *M[arianna]* but - for *m*.

Some symbols may have been based on signs of the zodiac, which was commonly used in cryptology from the Middle Ages. The symbol for *Mrs*, part of a sequence of interrelated signs indicating the titles *Mr*, *Mrs* and *Miss*, is identical to the most widely used graph for the sign of Pisces, while that for *ff* is very similar to the graphic structure used to denote Neptune. Mathematical symbols are also in evidence: for example, the minus and plus signs are used for *m* and *p* respectively, the equals sign for *s*, and the *differs from* sign for *pp*.<sup>1</sup> The full key to the crypt hand is given in Appendix 3.<sup>2</sup>

The crypt hand is difficult for the casual reader to decipher, even with the key, particularly because it runs continuously, omitting spaces between words and most upper case letters and punctuation. In some passages the script is tiny and cramped. With practice, however, it is relatively easily read and written and grammatical signposts may be discovered. Although Lister does not employ conventional punctuation, she often leaves a space between phrases or passages. Again, a word or a sequence of words may be underlined. These can be words or phrases that Lister wishes to stress, that are direct speech or thought, or that have special significance. Unfortunately Lister's underlining in some passages is so pervasive that it confuses rather than clarifies meaning. Punctuation is not always absent; speech marks in particular appear in a number of places where direct speech is represented, tagged or untagged, though this practice is not invariable.

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<sup>1</sup> There appears to be a pattern to the distribution of Greek letters which are substituted for the 8th and 12th, 18th and 22nd letters of the alphabet, and although I have not yet discerned a systematic pattern to the substitution of other symbols for other letters, it is possible, indeed likely, that Lister worked from one.

<sup>2</sup> Earlier keys have sometimes been rather rough and ready. Phyllis Ramsden's key to the code is invaluable and generally accurate, though incomplete, while those used by other scholars are sometimes rather inaccurate, as for example, when the equivalents of coded letters are given as capitals, which Lister rarely used in code (and for some of which had developed specific symbols); letters of the crypt hand alphabet have sometimes been incorrectly reproduced. Here I have reproduced Lister's own hand as closely as possible, indicating the relation in size of one letter to another, whether upper or lower case, and whether falling below the line or not.

Question marks and exclamation marks are also used, although, as these also represent letters of the alphabet in Lister's crypt hand, they can be misleading. The passage of crypt hand reproduced in Appendix 4, figure 1, illustrates Lister's use of spaces between phrases, underlining and occasional punctuation.

By October 1808 Lister was using this more complex crypt hand in her diary. For example, on 28 October of that year the entry, 'I had Miss A *on my knee, kissed [her]*' is partially in code (Liddington, 1994: 28). Raine employed the same code in her diary to record her meetings with Lister, as in this entry for August 1810:

- 14     *Dear Lister & I had a reconciliation ...*
- 16     *... Lister & I had a difference which was happily made up before*  
          *the conclusion of the day but left me e[x]ceedingly ill*
- 17     *... my husband came to me & finally a happy reunion was*  
          *accomplished* (Liddington, 1994: 28).

Raine's production of individual letters is a little different from Lister's but she uses the same alphabet and procedures, occasionally leaving spaces between sentences or paragraphs but otherwise running words together in a continuous stream. Only early examples of Raine's use of code have survived so it is not possible to tell whether her ability to produce the code quickly and coherently would have developed. On the other hand, very little of Lister's earliest encoded writing is in existence. We can speculate that she grew more accomplished in its application over time. The following transcription of a fragment of Raine's encoded writing was found among Anne Lister's papers in the Shibden Hall Muniments.<sup>3</sup> Dated Friday August 18 1810 in Lister's handwriting, it indicates the chaotic nature of Raine's literary production in crypt hand and the difficulties presented to the transcriber. The first version observes the disposition of the

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<sup>3</sup> For example of Raine's crypt hand writing see Appendix 4, figure 2.



letters as they appear in the fragment, without word breaks; the second offers an interpretation of the passage, separating words and adding capital letters where appropriate.

*after so painful a difference as has existed between my ever dear husband & myself I feel I cannot be satisfied unless I give you a written assurance that [th]en be forward shall this heart be open to you its inmost recesses exposed to your view & the key to evry avenue delivered to your care*

*I have been unjust ungenerous & suspecting you of a thousand errors your great mind can & never have been guilty of & secretly cherishing for you a diminution of respect for actions that have never existed*

*return I ask it once again to a heart frail & imperfect with its weakness yet fond & faithful to its object*

*pity the past & reclaim the future model me to your wishes by unremitting kindness & if I ever go astray from the path of my duty will you dear kind husband & protector of my life shew me this sad memorial of my contritions sad because a necessity has existed for it then remembering the [illegible] anguish of my past misery with all its concomitants vile my heart shall receive them & learn to appreciate the blessing of possessing such a husband devoted to you on these seventeenth of August eighteen hundred and ten*

*after so painful a difference as has existed between my ever dear husband & myself I feel I cannot be satisfied unless I give you a written assurance that [th]en be forward shall this heart be open to you its inmost recesses exposed to your view & the key to evry avenue delivered to your care*

*I have been unjust ungenerous & suspecting you of a thousand errors your  
great mind can & never have been guilty of & secretly cherished for you a  
diminution of respect for actions that have never existed  
return I ask it once again to a heart frail & imperfect with its weakness yet  
fond & faithful to its object  
pity the past & reclaim the future model me to your wishes by unremitting kindness  
& if I ever go astray from the path of my duty will you dear kind husband &  
protector of my life shew me this sad memorial of my contrition sad because a  
necessity has existed for it then remembering the ar[?illegible] anguish of my past  
misery with all its concomitant evils my heart shall receive the memento & learn to  
appreciate the blessing of possessing such a husband devoted to you on the  
seventeenth of august eighteen hundred and ten (SH: 7/ML/E).*

This missive seems to have been written in haste and gives signs of distress or anxiety not only in its sentiments but in its syntax, which is awkward and in places difficult to comprehend. Raine's unencoded literary production, as extracts from her letters reproduced in Chapter 2 demonstrate, is careful if perhaps less controlled than Lister's. The crypt hand, however, seemed either to encourage this freer construction or was designed to produce that effect, for Lister, too, seemed to be released from the strictures of the grammatical niceties that she observed in her unencoded writings. The passage of unedited transcription above scarcely conveys the impression given by a page of encoded writing, which is one of otherness, of a different mode of expression, of the esoteric coupled with intense intimacy.<sup>4</sup> The following excerpt from Lister's diary, dated 13 November 1816, is characteristic of the flow of narrative achieved in the encoded writing. Here she recounts a bedtime conversation after making love with Anne Belcombe

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 4, figure 1, for an example of encoded writing.

(Nantz), Marianna's sister. Nantz has asked Lister if '*the thing* [they had done] *was wrong*' or '*forbidden ... in the Bible*':

*I urged in my own defence the strength of natural feeling & instinct for so I might call it as I had always had the same turn from infancy [?] as it had been made known to me as it were by intuition that I had never varied & no effort on my part had been able to counter it that the girls liked me that I had never been refused by anyone & that without attempting to account for the thing I hoped it might under such circumstances be excused I mentioned the wickedness said to be practised by girls at schools but explained how this was quite different such as making use of instruments named the girl in Dublin who was obliged to have a surgeon extract a stick from her (Jane Duffin's story to Eliza Raine) secret & solitary vice in all that which I had never had any concern that in fact they would have given men pleasure & that I abhorred them all ... (SH: 7/ML/E).<sup>5</sup>*

This passage reads more smoothly than Raine's letter, but equally well illustrates a style that use of cipher seemed to encourage, one that is free-flowing but discursive, able to encompass a variety of simultaneously-held though not random ideas, suggesting immediacy as well as consideration. Although the moment at which the writing breaks into code is visually obvious in Lister's diary, the narrative contained in each encoded passage does not clearly possess a distinct beginning, or introduction, nor a specific conclusion. The impression produced is that all passages of encoded text are part of a greater whole, of a project that is continuous, without beginning, never-ending. To a great extent this is an effect created by the unusual appearance of the code; the eye is drawn to the passages of strange symbols rarely broken by spaces or punctuation and responds by making visual links between them, rather as it would with areas of colour on an otherwise

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<sup>5</sup> I have added spaces between words and capital letters for proper names.

plain white page. But it is also a literary effect: there are recurring topics that are always addressed in encoded text and never in unencoded text, like Lister's records of her bowel movements, menstrual periods and orgasms. Again, Lister sometimes seems to leap across passages of unencoded text to resume a theme, as in this example from her diary for 28 January 1836:

*A[nne Walker] right again ... can I still get the proper mastery? Or is she worth the trouble it will cost me? ... fair - raining all the day before more or less & then driven on by highish wind - A- off to Cliff Hill about 2¼ got there dry & home about 4½ rained all the way as she return[ed] but she was not much wet ... preparing for cousin [menstrual period] & dressing for dinner at accounts - settling Joseph Mann's book ... Listerwick cabin about £11 Mallin's bill for making woodwork of roof & door making not being yet ca[lled] in, & the value of the larch wood used J[oseph] included *A[nne] in good humour my calm dignified gravity does best* dinner at 6<sup>20</sup> (SH: 7/ML/E).<sup>6</sup>*

The short central passage of encoded text concerning Lister's preparation for her 'cousin' is part of the ongoing record of her menstrual cycle. The first and last encrypted passages are directly related to her contemplation of her relations with her partner, Anne Walker. They are separated by material which is connected chronologically or by association: the weather, Walker's trip to Cliff-hill, and the details of estate expenditure. These provide a record of actions or events in the outer world, while, with the exception of the remark about menstruation, the encoded text is concerned with the inner world, thoughts, attitudes and ideas.

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Mann was Lister's master miner. Mallin was the carpenter she employed.

### The diary as literary experiment

In Chapter 1, I quoted Carolyn Steedman's useful observation that 'self-narration by means of the pen draws into a chronology the inchoate items of life, bestows meaning by the very act of sequencing it, in some order, to some kind of end' (Steedman, 1996: 63). But in Lister's encoded diary there seems to be an attempt not simply to sequence life through self-narration, to order its inchoate items, but to construct meaning through the reproduction of the very effects it narrates. In other words, Lister tries to create a literary self-narrative in which the undeveloped experiences of life rub shoulders with the significant moments, in which the 'some kind of order' produced is one that is as diffuse and uncontrolled as life, and encompasses action, event and thought.

In the original manuscript of Lister's diary it can clearly be seen that individual words are not distinguished from each other by spaces (see Appendix 4, figure 1). The effect is that of a stream or effusion of spontaneous unmediated narrative into which the reader can plunge at random and each time emerge with a slightly different experience. Here there seems to be evidence of a remarkable and sophisticated literary experiment: to reproduce the processes and experience of *thought*. In thought, words are not separated by pauses or gaps as they are in written text; they are discerned much more as in speech, as complete when they constitute an aural, or its thought-equivalent, unit. Such an attempt predates similar experiments by the French Symbolists by several years and Modernism by many more.

The more closely I examine the text of Lister's diary, the more startling and innovative her literary project appears. Because the text is diffuse and attempts to reproduce the rhythms rather than, necessarily, the chronology of everyday life, it can be taken up at any point and the reader can make sense of it, can find meaning. Lister's diary has long been

Friday 15 November 1816. *Had a good kiss last night* At 12 Nantz & I walked over to dine & spend the day at Pye Nest. Mr Edwards, as usual on Friday being at his Mill, we did not see him - Nobody but Mrs Edwards & ourselves - set off to walk home at 5 - found I had taken something at dinner that disagreed with me - hardly got to the top of Pye Nest lane, before I felt violent pain in my bowels & sickness - hurried on, and, with great difficulty, got home about 6. Went to bed almost immediately. The day had been fine & frosty, &, but for my sickness, our walk back would have been very pleasant. Poor Nantz not well - having had much pain in her right side during day (SH: 7/ML/E).

Here the narrative is divided into easily digestible chunks (unlike Lister's dinner perhaps). The use of the dash often signals a rapid flow of thoughts or events, but it also creates a separation between them, so that while there is a sense of continuity, it is one that is rhythmic rather than constant. A further slowing of the pace occurs with the intervention of Lister's weather report between the account of her own indisposition and that of her friend. This is a favourite technique of hers. On many occasions she disrupts and disturbs the flow of narrative and the mood of a passage by suddenly reporting meteorological conditions, or begins an entry by a reading of the temperature in her room. From entry to entry this becomes a constant feature, assuming an importance that diminishes the impact of other material of a more emotional or dramatic kind. The effect of such reports in the context of a particularly candid piece of self-revelation is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

The use of the dash would clearly have presented a problem in passages of code given that it featured in the crypt hand alphabet as *m*. It is nevertheless interesting that from its inception Lister, and Raine, eschewed the use of even this informal kind of punctuation or indeed the imposition of a sentence structure at all in their encoded writing. The decision

regarded as historically significant.<sup>7</sup> Here, however, I wish to reclaim it as a project of literary significance. As a historical record, an examination of the diary in its chronological entirety may help counter the fragmentary nature of all sources. But as a work of literature, the diary may be read in a number of different ways. And although produced chronologically, it need not be approached through a time-sequence. As I have begun to uncover here, and as the coherence and intelligibility of Whitbread's 1988 and 1992 selections suggest, Lister's literary production stands up very well to selective reading. The patterns that emerge from an intimate self-narrative may not be chronological or even sequential, but be created by literary, psychological or visual links that may or may not have been self-consciously evoked by the writer. The *wholeness* of a work of literary self-construction may be conceived in different ways to other literary projects. The end of Lister's diary was imposed by her death. This was the completion of her desire at twenty-six to 'set [things] to rights as they ought to be ... if I mean to get it done in my lifetime' (Whitbread 1988: 16). A selective reading may, as well as a chronological one, reveal how she 'set things to right'

Lister's interest in literary experiment is not confined to the encoded diary. The unencoded passages are meticulously and frequently punctuated and here words are separated not only by spaces but by dashes. The contrast thus created between encoded and unencoded text is dynamic and demanding. The following complete diary entry illustrates the number of clauses and pauses Lister employed in the unencoded parts of her diary. Such formal grammatical procedures slow the pace and give the impression of measured and careful consideration.

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<sup>7</sup> Anne Lister's descendant, John Lister (1847-1933), who inherited Shibden Hall in 1867, produced several articles from her diary, which the Halifax Guardian described as 'throwing light on some features of the town in the year when Her Majesty [Queen Victoria] ascended the throne' (Liddington, 1994: 13).

to let each word run into the next may have been justified in terms of security, for it slows down the rate at which the code may be read by a casual observer, even with the key. But it also allowed the production of narrative as an unrestricted spontaneous outpouring and for young women heavily schooled in English grammar and used to constructing their most intimate thoughts and ideas within its confines, it must have provided a remarkable sense of release.

### **To encode or not to encode**

Which parts of her self-narrative did Lister choose to encode and which not? In a later section I offer evidence that in her correspondence with Eliza Raine, and in her early diary, Lister had strong motives to hide both their financial and sexual relationship. The encoding of money matters and sexual affairs was a practice Lister continued throughout her life in her diary and letters (although not invariably). Letters may be opened and it was clearly in the interests of Lister and her lovers to conceal their passionate exchanges in their correspondence. Marianna Belcombe, for example, was vulnerable to letters being seized by her husband. However, while this may have necessitated the use of the code to disguise any amorous feelings, its very appearance might have been enough to excite his suspicions. The shared code had therefore the further effect of creating an aura of exclusivity or romance around Lister and her lovers, alerting other parties to their exclusion from the secret and thus regenerating the need for concealment. Although there was this obvious justification for encoding correspondence, after the earliest years there was no real need for Lister to be quite so secretive about her amours in her diary (though perhaps the more explicit details were not suitable for her relatives' perusal.). Her aunt, father and sister, and even her uncle, were aware of her sexuality, and she admitted few



guests to the household. The danger of the diary being stolen by a disgruntled servant was perhaps the greatest threat. However, the appearance of the code may not only have become erotically suggestive by its continued use to recount Lister's amorous adventures, but its employment also provided an amusing intellectual challenge and another example of Lister's cleverness. In financial matters discretion may have been necessary and Lister's cogitations on these continued after her money dealings with Raine were long finished.<sup>8</sup> For example, on 31 October 1816, she recounted a conversation with her aunt and uncle:

While they were at supper read from p.43 to 51 of [her current book] *after tea we had a long talk about family affairs I advised my uncle to entail Shibden & at his death should my Aunt Anne survive let her come into all as it stands for her life I said I wished him to prevent my Aunt Lister or my mother having thirds & mentioned my father's having once said /namely 3. July 1814/ he would leave Marian & me joint heirs to which I objected as it might lead to the place being sold my uncle agreed seemed annoyed & from what I could guess meant me to have it he said to me when I came down after supper was over well you need not mind he has said before speaking of the Weighton estate and my mother's threat to give it all to Marian well let Marian take it when I told that Mr Wilson had last November refused to gather the loan of fifty pounds for a fe[w] [w]eeks both my uncle & aunt seemed much annoyed I [t]old [how] ungentlemanlike my father's manners were become etc etc. they agreed (SH: 7/ML/E).*

Lister represents herself as speaking forcefully to her uncle and aunt about the estate and about her mother, father and sister. Her use of code in the majority of this passage may

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<sup>8</sup> Raine was committed to a mental asylum at the end of 1814.

be attributable to a number of causes. Perhaps she felt the need to hide a bald narration of the occasion which would have shocked her elderly relatives' sensibilities; perhaps Lister did not in fact articulate the sentiments recounted here out loud, but rather incorporated them tacitly into her diary where her designs on and expectations of the Shibden estate could be acknowledged. She may have wished to conceal these aspects of her self from her uncle and aunt out of duplicity, concern for their peace of mind, habit, or all three. It is equally reasonable to conclude that the entire event may not have taken place at all in real time but was rather part of Lister's wider literary self-construction as a woman of property and natural civility who recognized the duties owed to her aunt and uncle but was not afraid to speak her mind. In this case Lister used the mode that most suited her self-production as the high-minded chivalrous but ruthless rescuer of an ancient family in which she familiarly recreated roles for herself through the eyes of a candid omniscient narrator. The crypt hand allowed grammatical licence, conveyed the urgency and continuity of her project and was associated with this self-knowing ironic voice. Lister's decision to encode then may not have been based solely on the need for concealment of certain matters. Other criteria, such as, for example, superstition or emotional attachment may have figured in her choice, and literary considerations, such as the crypt hand's ability to express thought-units, must have played their part.

The text of her diary moves rapidly between encoded and unencoded passages, even between encoded and unencoded words. Sometimes it is the encoded revelations of sexual passion or anxiety, and sometimes the unencoded day-to-day record of estate business, travel and other matters that appear to be embedded. For example, here is an entry of 3 December 1832 in which the encoded words are italicized: '*incurred a cross* [orgasm] *just before getting up thinking of Miss W* wild windy rainy morning & F[ahrenheit] 49[degrees] at 8 ¼ am Breakfast in the little room at 9.10 ... nearly emptied

[the] ... book cupboard in the little sitting room then emptied the other ...' (SH: 7/ML/E).

It is hard to convey in transcription the effect these changes between modes create; the two sites are visually signalled yet theoretically may be read as a seamless whole.

Another longer entry may begin to suggest how Lister's encoded material sits beside the unencoded. This diary entry of Friday 8 November 1816 offers evidence both of that candid self-explanatory approach, and of the justification of Lister's sexual interests within her social activities. The occasion was the visit to Shibden Hall by Anne 'Nantz' Belcombe just after the marriage of Marianna to Charles Lawton that I discussed in the Introduction. Encoded words are distinguished here by italics:

Friday 8 November 1816

Nantz & I walked over to Pye Nest & sat with Mrs Edwards an hour - on our return met my Aunt Anne at Mrs Veitch's & got home to Dinner at 3. In the course of conversation Nantz told me, M[arianna] now thinks it would have been better if C[harles] & she had gone to Lawton tête-à-tête after the wedding *Anne & I lay awake last night till 4 in the morning I let her into my penchant for the ladies expatiated on the nature of my feelings towards her & hers towards me told her that she might not deceive herself as to the nature of my sentiments & the strictness of my intentions towards her I could feel the same in at least 2 more instances & named her sister Eliza as one saying that I did not dislike her in my heart but rather admired her as a pretty girl I asked Anne if she liked me the worse for my candour etc etc she said no kissed me & proved by her manner she did not we went to great lengths as we had often done before such as feeling her all over pushing my finger up her etc but still did not get to the last extremity I asked her several times to let me get nearer to her & have a proper kiss she seemed as if she would have by no means have disliked it but as if she thought it*

*right to refuse which she did very languidly I not wishing the thing did not press it very eagerly but she certainly did not dislike it I do not admire her but rather feel a sort of disgust for her she is not nice & her breath is disagreeable however her manners made me feel desire & had she not been M's sister I should instantly have closed with her & taken what pleasure I could get* The day has been very fine - a strong frost & excellent walking - after tea read aloud from p.337 to the end of secret memoirs of Buonaparte - this is the most interesting work I have read for a long time - the writer declares he shall never be known ... (SH: 7/ML/E).

Lister sets her encoded night-time encounter beside a unencoded description of the weather and, appropriately, a remark on Buonaparte's secret memoirs, a reminder that memoirs are no guarantee of reliable or complete knowledge of the writer. The device creates the impression that each strand of self-narrative is of equal significance, and as a result, diminishes what would otherwise be the primacy of the encoded narrative, which is itself remarkable for its use of literary devices to support nuances of meaning. The release of information building up tension to that declaration of disgust is carefully contrived to create a shocking revelation, while the brutality of the final encoded sentence is emphasized by the blandness of the following observation on weather conditions and books. The obviously unusual appearance of the encoded words, while supposedly concealing their secrets, emphasizes and draws attention to them. The encoded passage is unpunctuated and its syntax, and sense, is therefore more anarchic, apparently less controlled, than the careful grammatical constructions of the unencoded. The provocative ambiguity of such a combination of concealment and display is one of the characteristics of Lister's literary production.

The sudden shift from encoded to unencoded writing, and vice versa, produces strange admixtures of material within a single entry.<sup>9</sup> I have suggested that the crypt hand passages themselves embrace multifarious feelings, ideas and experiences and that the continuous flow of encoded words tends to accord equal value to all of these. The juxtaposition of this apparently free-flowing narrative beside the careful syntactical construction of the unencoded text creates further dynamic effects. Textual mode, style, and content are disrupted; temporal, thematic and semantic connections are suggested by the contiguity of disparate material; the apparent continuity of a single entry signalled by its appearance, by its being collected together under one heading, and by the lack of separation between its different facets, jostles with the discontinuity indicated by the shift between encoded and unencoded script and between themes. The literary experiment extends beyond the crypt hand and into the entire literary production. This entry for 6 Feb 1832, when Lister was staying in Hastings with her friend (and at the time intended lover) Vere Hobart, sandwiches the ubiquitous weather report (unencoded) between two encoded remarks whose significance is once again somehow flattened or reduced by the arrangement: *'incurred a cross [orgasm] thinking of M[arianna] just before getting up* fine morning F 57° at 9<sup>10</sup> in the room & 48° at 9<sup>50</sup> in the balcony - down at 10 - breakfasted - stayed down talked till 11½ *somehow joking about Mr Belfour*' (SH: 7/ML/E). Lister's organization of the material ensures that her orgasm, which was achieved by the contemplation of her greatest love, and her joking about Mr Belfour, one of Hobart's suitors whom she regarded as a threat, seem both as commonplace as the temperature on the balcony, and as strange as each other. All aspects of her self-narrative appear to be accorded equal, if different, value, though, in what may be a deliberate irony,

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 4, figure 4, for a sample entry from Lister's diary which includes both encrypted and unencrypted text.

the weather, continually changing, is a more constant presence in her diary than almost any other feature.

Lister's diary entry for Saturday 9 November 1816 is a model of the changes in style, emphasis, tone and language that she could encompass in a single page of encrypted and unencrypted writing, and of the symmetry she could achieve within those changes. It begins in cipher, taking up the continuing narrative of the progress of her affair with Nantz Belcombe, who in the encrypted passages is referred to as Anne, as though this were a different person. Lister constructs herself in the mould of one made impatient by the vacillations of her lover who will not allow herself to be brought to orgasm ('*have a kiss*'). She characteristically links her account of her sexual frustration with her digestive ill-health. Having made Nantz cry by suggesting that she has another lover, and promising that this will make her '*behave better*', Lister follows quickly with a remark showing that she will get her wicked way in the end. The whole of this encrypted passage has a stagey air. Lister's self-construction as the persistent roué is heavily-dramatized, almost comically overplayed, with the latter remark produced like a stage villain's whispered aside to the audience. The consciousness of an audience is so palpable here that it is hard not to read the unencrypted passage that immediately follows as equally contrived, although this reverts to the genteel, carefully articulated style of the proper lady, whom I compared in the Introduction to Jane Austen's fictional character, Emma Woodhouse.

The entry begins:

*talking to Anne almost all morning telling she should either be on or off that she was acting very unfairly and ought either to make up her mind to let me have a kiss at once or change her manner altogether I said she excited my feelings in a way that was very unjustifiable unless she meant to gratify them and that really that sort*

*of thing made me far from well as I was then very sick languid and uncomfortable not able to relish anything I had eaten my breakfast or meals well either this morning or yesterday I told her ... that she might not deceive herself about the nature of my regard that my plans for the future were fixed and that I was engaged I asked her if she would come and see me saying I would behave better and quite differently together then she made moans ... but cried she would certainly like to have me herself but such is her fondness and such her readiness that I am sure without much pressuring she will soon take me on any terms* Nantz sat down to write to Mrs Steph.[Belcombe, her mother] but being nervous & unable to go on, she had only written 4 or 5 lines when I took up the pen, filled the paper - thanked Harriet [Nantz's sister] for her letter to me by Nantz - gave a sort of reluctant consent to her calling her 1st girl Mariana Percy, & sent the Hist.[ory] to the post - last night very stormy - both rain & snow - ye ground covered thicker than yesterday morning then melting during the day, made the roads so dirty, we did not stir out ... (SH: 7/ML/E).

The sense that a complex self-narrative is being constructed here is reinforced rather than undermined by the details of the weather, for in the space of a few lines Lister has moved from impatient, sexually-overwrought lesbian lover to amateur metereologist, the latter being a very fitting hobby for a young lady. But while there are identifiable shifts taking place here, both syntactically, stylistically and in terms of self-construction, there is also a clearly continuing narrative. Anne of the encrypted passage is the same person as Nantz of the unencrypted. The effects of the events described in the encrypted passage resonate into the unencrypted. Nantz is hesitant, 'nervous & unable to get on' with her letter; Lister shows herself being assertive, even domineering, taking the task from her by force, and bringing it to a rapid conclusion. The symmetry between apparently disparate threads

of narrative is completed by her account of weather conditions which replicates the emotional progress of her affair with Nantz: 'Last night very stormy [Anne refuses Lister's sexual advances/Nantz nervous and unable to write]... melting during the day [Anne cries/Lister helps her write letter] ... made the roads dirty, we did not stir out [a difficult situation is resolved by staying together].'

This entry follows Lister's usual practice of encrypting material that touched on her close personal relationships, with her lovers, her family and eventually with her life-partner, Anne Walker, although as I argue in the later section 'Lister and her lovers', she carefully selected material for encryption and may have created deliberate areas of exclusion or privilege within her circle of friends and lovers by its use. It is by no means clear whether she gave her partner, Anne Walker, a copy of the key. She records her thoughts about Walker in acerbic terms without apparent regard for discovery (although it is always possible that discovery, and thus the indirect communication of her judgements and opinions, was what she hoped for). In the later diary from 1834 onwards, when she was living with Walker, Lister often begins an entry with a crypt hand account of overnight love-making which she reduces to a curt formula, '*/4!*' or '*\5/4!*', ('*kiss*' or '*no kiss*') and a remark about Walker's state of mind, '*A in good sorts*' (SH: 7/ML/E). This is often followed by an unencoded report on the weather, the time at which breakfast was taken, and her morning itinerary, which on Sundays might be reading and church attendance or prayers at home, and on weekdays at Shibden included visits to the farm yard and instructions to her estate manager. The following entry again demonstrates the range and variety of her narrative:

Monday 18 January 1836

*no kiss F 39° at 8<sup>35</sup> A[nne] had Mary lacing up her stays her blister place not looked but I did it up last night & luckily it is well she smile at breakfast &*



*said she was better but tho I talked a good deal & as if not much had happened yet my gravity was there I never kissed till she came to me to pay toll on going to the water closet* breakfast at 9 started a bit after A[nne] - reading Holland on the Laws of Life from p.91 to 113 - out at 10 1/4 - [Robert] Mann + 3 shifting drift scale to front of house then with Joseph Mann at Listerwick Cabin ... (SH: 7/ML/E).<sup>10</sup>

Here both encoded and unencoded text appears to have been written rapidly and to have remained unedited. The word 'at' seems to be missing from the phrase '*her blister place not looked [at]*', and 'her' from '*I never kissed [her]*'; a 'd' is needed on the end of '*smile[d]*'. The unencoded weather report is terse and the account of her morning's activities on the estate hasty and abbreviated. The impression is of a morning packed with emotional and physical activity, including Lister's rather curious custom of exacting a 'toll' (a kiss) from Anne Walker before she could use the water closet.

As I have indicated in other chapters, Lister was a meticulous editor of her own writing and her decision to leave the above entry uncorrected may have been taken on the literary grounds that the breathless unrevised style of both encoded and unencoded passages best conveyed the mood and events of that morning. On other occasions, her reproduction and revision of entries has been made some time after the date to which they refer. She kept a monthly index of the events she had recorded, as I have described, and this occurs *at the beginning* of the sequence of entries, from which it must be assumed that she left a page free and filled it in appropriately later.<sup>11</sup> Occasionally she wrote or rewrote all the entries in retrospect. A memorandum, dated 14 September 1816, at the top of the index for August 1816, shows how she 'wrote out this part of my journal from notes after my return

<sup>10</sup> Transcribed as it appears in the manuscript.

<sup>11</sup> In a diary entry for January 1818, Lister, complaining that she has got behind with her diary, resolves to 'write my indices as I go along' (Whitbread, 1988: 36).

from Lawton which accounts for the date of my getting this book Saturday the fourteenth of November one thousand eight hundred and sixteen' (SH: 7/ML/E/26/2), a gap of three months from the earliest entry.

The index, like the diary itself, is partly in crypt hand and partly not. Episodes or remarks recorded in crypt hand in the daily entries appear in crypt hand in the index, even though in their reduced form they do not necessarily need concealment. Use of crypt hand here clearly signals different strands of narrative and allows encrypted entries to be identified quickly. Passages that are not encoded in the diary proper are not indexed in crypt hand. The result displays in miniature the diversity and complexity of Lister's literary production, as this extract from the index for 5 to 30 November 1816 demonstrates:

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| Tues. 5 | Dates of the different battles in the Peninsula - Population of same.   |
| Th. 7   | Dr Alexander breakfasted here - Anne B[elcombe] arrived.<br>Letter from M[arianna] - & from Mrs H.J.B[elcombe] - 1st snow of the winter.  |
| Fri. 8  | Letter from Miss Marsh - Eliza B[elcombe]'s arrival - Letter from Fisher & the rosary from I.N.[Isabella Norcliffe]. Anne & I called at Pye Nest & Mrs Veitch's <i>conversation at night</i> France not poised at Jaffa by order of Buonaparte assassination of the Duke d'Enghien - character of Josephine - |
| Sat. 9  | <i>said I was engaged</i> Wrote to Mrs H.J.B[elcombe]. 1st girl to be M[arianna]P[ercy]B[elcombe]   |
| Sun. 10 | <i>first kiss of Anne last night</i>  |
| Mon. 11 | Wrote to M[arianna]   |

- Tues. 12      Ann & I called at M[ickle]gate - Min[iature?] from I[sabella]  
 Wed. 13 Norcliffe by Mrs Copley *kiss more pain than pleasure*  
*Anne asks if it be wrong said M[arianna] desired me not to be*  
*foolish with Anne* Note from Mrs Edwards - shewed Anne  
 C[harles Lawton]'s note of 19 March
- Th. 14      *Anne owns she had pleasure with me* (SH: 7/ML/E).

While the disguise of allusions to ‘kisses [giving or experiencing orgasms]’ and to love-making may be justified by the danger of the index being seen by Lister’s aunt or uncle, or a servant, there seems little necessity for her to hide such notes as ‘*conversation at night*’ or ‘*said I was engaged*’ except that the full entries are in crypt hand and Lister wished to distinguish from a glance at the index which entries were encrypted and which were not. Her retrospective selection of noteworthy moments maintains the same hybrid effect as the diary as a whole and declares which parts of her diary-writing she considered significant enough to feature in the index. The index entry for Friday 8 November 1816, for instance, discreetly summarizes the description of love-making with Anne Belcombe (discussed above) as ‘*conversation at night*’ and sandwiches it between mention of routine social calls and the assassination of the Duke d’Enghien. The juxtaposition seems to suggest that all these matters are of equal importance, or even that the ‘*conversation at night*’, so briefly touched upon, is scarcely worth mentioning. This effect is belied, however, by its appearance in cipher.

### Propriety and the crypt hand

Lister’s decision to encode can seem arbitrary, but was probably based on notions of propriety drawn from current social attitudes, her own idiosyncratic self-narrative as a

gentlewoman of natural good breeding, and from her changing circumstances of rank and wealth.<sup>12</sup> For example, the dispute between Lister and Walker on 17 January 1836 about the use of the ancient and unfashionable ‘yellow carriage’, a Lister heirloom, is lengthily recounted in crypt hand:

*... went to see if A was ready all wrong about going to church in the yellow carriage would not go at all said I was really sorry but really she had consented to it no she knew nothing about it & I had promised never to ask her again to go to church in the yellow carriage ... shall I order the horses to be put to the other carriage no said she I can order for myself the yellow carriage used to stand much longer unused ... (SH: 7/ML/E).*

There is much more along the same lines. Lister clearly thought such an account more appropriate to the encrypted self-narrative than the following exchange of 1 January 1836 which appears in unencrypted script:

*... I sat reading the Greek botany in the encyclopaedia of geography till 8<sup>55</sup> & stood with them [father, sister Marian and Anne Walker] till 10 during which time read the newspapers - find Marian with A - all annoyed about John Clarke & Mary Rhodes - a little partiality between them - John [h]ad to get out and keep out of park - Marian sick of her household no order etc. etc. consoled her as well as I could - proposed setting all right by my being considered in my father's place - my being master & nearly mistress - made this plan palatable to all - ... (SH: 7/ML/E).*

The sentiments reported here, ‘my being master & nearly mistress’, would in earlier days have been expressed in crypt hand, as in the conversation with her uncle in 1816 about the disposal of Shibden Hall, discussed above. The crypt hand might also have been

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<sup>12</sup> I discuss Lister's self-construction as a person of ancient family and natural propriety in Chapter 5.

used for remarks about her sister being ‘all annoyed’ and being found ‘with A[nne Walker]’. It is almost as though Lister conceived of two distinct threads of her narrative. But although it would be convenient to separate them into, say, the inner and the outer life (the first encoded, the second not), or fantasy and fact (similarly designated), there is no strong evidence for oppositional divisions. The selection is more subtle: each mode engages with some of the same material as the other, and details may be supplied in either, suggesting rather a shift of attention or consciousness as the narrative and Lister’s self-construction develops than necessarily a change in subject-matter.<sup>13</sup> In an extract from Lister’s 1831 diary concerning her ambitions to shine in local intellectual society, the two threads are closely entwined but are distinguishable by that fine line between what Lister thought within the bounds of propriety (in her own terms), and what without:

Thinking as I dressed of the Literary & philosophical society just established at Halifax. I have thought of it repeatedly since hearing of it - *building castles in the air about the part I myself might take in furthering it - about its becoming celebrated* etc etc. Think of rules that might be for the good of the Society - ladies should be admitted as fellows ... To prevent overflow of useless members let everyone be elected on the doing some benefit to the society by mind or money ... *All this leads to my old thought and wish for ladies under certain restrictions to be restored to certain political rights - voting for Members* etc. On civil & political rights - the difference between them - why should the latter be withheld from any person of sufficient property (interest in the state) and education to be fairly presumed to know how to make good use of them? (Liddington 1998: 45).

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<sup>13</sup> There are, however, two topics that I have not found addressed *outside* the encrypted text: sexual encounters or the details of the health of her bowels.

The distinction between the ideas expressed in crypt hand and those in unencoded text is worthy of examination. Lister did indeed pursue the point that 'ladies should be admitted as fellows' to the Halifax Literary and Philosophical Society and in 1833 she added her name to the list of twelve subscribers to the fund for the proposed museum: 'I laughed on looking over the list and finding myself the only lady' (Liddington 1998: 45). The question of how active a part she should take in the Society and the celebrity this might achieve for her is disguised by crypt hand. She further distances herself from her desire by describing it as '*castles in the air*'. In her fantasy, Lister can imagine herself as a figure of philosophical and literary celebrity, but she separates this carefully from what is socially acceptable or achievable. The subject-matter is very similar in both unencoded and encoded text; Lister's attitude to it, however, shifts and develops as the two modes are exchanged. Her reference to a long-held '*old thought and wish*' for ladies in certain circumstances to be enfranchised, indeed 'restored' to their rights, is a matter to which she has clearly devoted some close attention but does not wish to commit to the unencoded part of the diary whose self-constructive drive tended to confirm and support her conservatism. Yet that rider in which she laughs to find herself 'the only lady' on the list refers back ironically to her encoded desire of '*furthering [the Society] - about its becoming celebrated*'. The irony is one which is tied to both the process of encryption and to Lister's acute consciousness of her position in society. If her desires were formerly concealed by the crypt-hand they had now become partially apparent by her presence on that list, though only she knew the full extent of the daydreams which the reality fulfilled.

### Sharing the crypt hand with Eliza Raine

The encoded passages from the correspondence between Lister and Raine declare how far status, class and sexual love were constructed by Lister as interdependent matters, and usefully reveal how far the crypt hand was involved in their relational dynamics and in the development of Lister's self-construction. Although the extent of their public declaration of love is not known, both young women had clearly agreed to employ the crypt hand to conceal written references to their sexual and emotional relationship, perhaps for reasons of discretion, out of fear of disgrace or punishment, but also perhaps because the crypt hand intensified their intimacy by creating a secret language known, at least ostensibly, only to them. The intensity of the relationship seemed to favour Lister. It is clear from Raine's letters during the period from 1806, when Lister left the York school, until Raine's apparent mental breakdown in August 1814, that Raine clandestinely borrowed substantial sums of money against her inheritance and lent or gave them to Lister. Lister does not allude to these in her written replies. She became suddenly and unusually circumspect, indicating just how fragile her social position was at this time, and how calculating she could be even about material supposedly concealed by crypt hand. (By this time, Lister may, as I shall shortly suggest, have distributed the crypt hand alphabet to other lovers.) It indicates too a desire on the part of Raine to make a written record of the transactions and draw them into the literary construction of their shared narrative. Brief encoded passages in Raine's letters, then, are the only indication of what must have been a social embarrassment for Lister. A letter from Raine of June 1811, addressed to 'My dear dear Lister', begins with a scribbled note: '*Any thing you want we will send you so dont be bashful.*' The mystery of what might constitute 'any thing' is explained by a encoded postscript: '*Don't say anything but Miss Sway says Miss*

*M is practising upon you her deceptions & that she has been assailed but has resisted ... For gods sake be cautious & ... prudent as ever & in every action ... [let] prudence guide you ... I mean to send you twenty pounds ...* ' (SH: 7/ML/A/30). Here Raine frames the relationship in her terms: as a protective and anxious lover she keeps her ear to the ground to warn Lister of possible dangers arising from her exuberant but transgressive sexuality, while bailing her out of financial difficulties with cash handouts. The element of control Raine apparently enjoyed as a result is acknowledged in the encoded conclusion to a letter she wrote to Lister just a month later: *'I have sent you thirty pounds & do as I desire you'* (SH: 7/ML/A/31).

Lister was not well off at this time and her ambitions to raise the fortunes of her disreputable family were far from being realized. Raine was in a position to offer Lister money from her promised inheritance and connections, through her cousin Lady Crawford and her York friends. Although she records an occasion when 'Mr Hammond of Norwich lately travelling this way with 2 or 3 gentlemen met on the street a lady of colour' and commented that 'he was struck with that lady, who should it be but yr very humble ser<sup>t</sup>' (SH: 7/ML/A/42, emphasis in original), Raine makes little allusion to her own vulnerability. Her letter from Halifax of 29 May 1812 relates the continuing disgrace of Lister's mother, who 'gets drunk now constantly & exposes herself sadly'. Worryingly for Lister's hopes of support from her Northgate uncle, Raine reports that Uncle Joseph says 'if yr Mother goes drunk there he'll turn her out of the house', but a promise is held out in the shape of Raine's will: 'I do wish to dispose of my fortune to my mind'. These revelations, undoubtedly galling to Lister, are in unencoded text. In crypt hand a postscript promises: *'Remember Welly [Raine's pet name for Lister] that you send for more when you want it if I go to York my purse shall be yours & myself the suply [sic] of all wants & necessities I shall send you a pair of stays & some nice cambric pocket*



*handlers* [handkerchiefs]' (SH: 7/ML/A/37). Lister, as the recipient as well as the initiator of encoded messages, might well have experienced some ire at this subtle combination of well-meaning but possibly patronizing friendship with the cool and open revelation of her family's disgrace. When Raine comes into her inheritance in August 1812, she at once communicates in crypt hand to Lister her intention to withdraw '*two hundred & fifty of the principal*' with which she intends to furnish her house, to make her guardian, Mr Duffin, '*a handsome present*' and '*have in reserve for your Bath jaunt ... thirty or forty pound*' (SH: 7/ML/A46).

The use of crypt hand in this correspondence, while potentially irritating, served Lister well. Raine's money and gifts clearly helped her to observe the proper forms for middle-class and gentry society, enabling her to have '*fine handlers*' and go on '*jaunts*' to Bath. References to her reliance on Raine's financial assistance were concealed from important if casual observers of the letters, her Shibden aunt, for example, her parents, Raine's guardians, the Duffins, and the parents of girls whom she had met at the York school and to whom she now paid extended visits. At the same time, the crypt hand drew Raine into close collusion with Lister's plans and ambitions, creating an appearance of privileged and grateful friendship. While Lister wished to keep secret their sexual and financial intimacy, the crypt hand produced for Raine an illusion of power and control in the relationship. Her own impulse to secrecy was slight and seems to have been brought on less by concern for social respectability than by fear of jeopardizing her inheritance. After her twenty-first birthday, in possession of her fortune, Raine was far from cautious in her conduct to her guardian and her recklessness may have contributed to her eventual committal to an insane asylum.

With her financial and emotional dependence on Raine successfully hidden, Lister could with impunity take an opposing side in the uproar that attended Raine's fall from

grace. She chose to support Raine's principal accuser, Miss Marsh, the mistress of Mr Duffin, whom Lister had met through Raine. Marsh makes it clear in her letters to Lister that she believes that Raine has been the recipient of Lister's beneficence rather than vice versa and refers to Raine as ungrateful and having taken an unreasonable and 'virulent antipathy' to 'all She used to like' (SH: 7/ML/A/64, emphasis in original). Lister did not disabuse her of this and the encoded letters successfully preserved her sexual and financial secrets.

The events surrounding the shifts in Lister's relationship with Raine illustrate the importance of the crypt hand in the construction of Lister's social identity. Lister's reluctance to commit to paper in any form, encoded or unencoded, an admission of her financial dependence on Raine makes it clear that she did indeed have in mind a readership that would judge her on the evidence of her self-narrative. The encoded passages in her diary and letters which appear so spontaneously frank may be seen as in fact calculatedly and carefully chosen to produce the effect Lister desired. When relations broke down between the two women, Raine repeatedly requested the return of her letters, but they are still in the Shibden collection, retained among Lister's correspondence.

### **Sharing the crypt hand with other lovers**

The key to the cipher was not kept exclusively for the use of Lister and Raine. What Raine did with it is not known, but Lister subsequently gave copies of the 'crypt hand alphabet' to other lovers, and even to casual admirers, and they too used it in their correspondence (Whitbread, 1988: 142). For example, on 30 August 1820, Lister received a letter from Marianna Belcombe referring, in crypt hand, to a promise made by Lister (Whitbread, 1988: 132). The next day Lister replied in crypt hand to Belcombe

‘disclaiming very gently having given her a promise & bidding her send me back my letters & be careful’ (a caution oddly reminiscent of Eliza Raine’s warnings to Lister).

‘Of all the crypt hand’ in this letter, Lister ‘kept a copy’ (Whitbread, 1988: 132-3).

Startlingly, Lister passed on the key to the crypt hand to women with whom she expected to have only the briefest flirtation, like Miss Vallance, a young woman she met during a stay at Isabella Norcliffe’s house, who apparently admired Lister but to whom Lister gave only scant attention. After an evening when she had flirted shamelessly with an entire roomful of women, Lister wrote the following diary entry:

All up late & none of us went to church. From 3 to 4, packing. Miss Vallance put, in one of my drawers, a sealed parcel of spills to light candles with & a note enclosed, half sheet full, very affectionate. She certainly likes me & is very low & nervous about my going ... Gave her the crypt hand alphabet which M- has ... but was not very tender. Indeed, I get lukewarm about her (Whitbread, 1988: 142).

Dropped hints and rumours ensured that Lister’s practice of keeping a document recording the financial, social and sexual affairs of her neighbours was widely known. For example, Isabella Norcliffe revealed its existence during a visit to her neighbours, the Saltmarshes:

Isabel, much to my annoyance, mentioned my keeping a journal, & setting down everyone’s conversation in my peculiar hand-writing (what I call crypt hand). I mentioned the almost impossibility of its being deciphered & the facility with which I wrote & not at all shewing my vexation at Isabella’s folly naming the thing. Never say before her what she may not tell for, as to what she ought to keep or what she ought to publish, she has the worst judgement in the world (Whitbread, 1988: 96).

If Lister's use of crypt hand in her diary was for the purposes of maintaining total secrecy and concealing her writing from everyone but herself, as seemed to be the intention of Beatrix Potter's cipher, for instance, then her distribution of copies of the key conflicted with this aim. However, this clearly was not her sole intention. By making the key accessible to a number of other people she followed the practice of many secret societies which emphasize both the inclusiveness and the exclusivity of their network by employing particular signs, gestures, dress-codes and written codes known only to their members. Such a practice not only creates a common ground between those in the know, while excluding those outside, but it also produces a shared sense of mystery and adventure that reinforces intimacy and helps obscure differences. It makes a cipher into an active currency and gives it a role more common to cryptography than that of concealing private thoughts, that is, as a conduit for secret messages and communications whose publication might place its users in danger. The association of codes and ciphers with radical groups of all persuasions, with plotters and subversives, can only have enhanced its romantic appeal. Despite her ostensible conservatism, Lister, as I argue in other chapters, was greatly interested in swashbuckling tales of daring and explored these in her self-constructive narratives. The French revolution held a romantic fascination for her. A diary entry of 8 November 1816 remarks on her reading 'some very interesting anecdotes of the Imperial espionage' and of 'one, particularly, so, of a Mad.<sup>elle</sup> D- a great beauty who had the heart to be reclaimed to virtue - & to love in turn - & marry from real affection the man she was sent to ruin' (SH:7/ML/E). The use of codes and ciphers by various factions of that turbulent period would have given them an added glamour.

The cipher she adopted thus began to provide the rudiments of a secret language shared not only by Lister and Eliza Raine but among a network of 'women who are too fond of women', with Lister at its pivotal point. Those so privileged could use the crypt hand in

communications with each other and in their own private writings, and in the process gain and allow theoretical access to each other's most intimate feelings and thoughts. In their diaries and letters, the change from unencoded to encoded communication, clearly delineated in the text, signalled the moment of entry into the world of lesbian experience and identity. The clandestine nature of this world was at least partially constructed by the crypt hand itself, for while it may not have had their full approval, Lister's aunt and uncle knew of her sexual and emotional attachments, as, later, did Marianna Belcombe's husband.

As Lister's diary and her correspondence with Raine suggest, the crypt hand was also closely tied to questions of social identity, rank, wealth, independence and inter-dependence, individual and relational development. But the visual appearance of the crypt hand would, by association with the network that shared it, have been emotionally, even erotically, charged. At the same time, it excluded those who did not possess the key and intensified the intimacy of the privileged network.

What were the criteria for becoming part of the community of crypt hand users? Was it being Lister's lover, her intimate friend, the recipient of her amorous attentions? I have proposed that Lister may not have given her eventual partner, Anne Walker, access to the crypt hand alphabet. There is no evidence that she made it known to Vere Hobart, the woman she wooed but lost in 1832. Much as Lister desired it, Hobart was not her lover, while Walker was. Miss Vallance, mentioned above, seemed not to have engaged in any more sensual activity with Lister than light flirting. Miss Marsh and Lister were very good friends but do not appear to have used the cipher in their correspondence. I have found no indication that Marsh was versed in it, though she is very likely to have known of it, probably from Lister herself, if not from other friends. I have not established whether Maria Barlow, Lister's Paris lover, was in receipt of it.

Eliza Raine had the crypt hand; Marianna Belcombe had it, as probably did her sisters; Isabella Norcliffe knew it, as did Miss Vallance with whom Lister had flirted at Norcliffe's house. All these women Lister met before she inherited Shibden Hall in 1826. This major development in her fortunes changed Lister's approach in her literary self-narrative as it did in the outward conduct of her life. I have argued that the crypt hand was not so much focused on specific subject-matter as on attitudes and consciousness. Thus, as she grew more secure in her inheritance, Lister became bolder about expressing proprietorial feelings for Shibden outside the cipher. Again, as I have shown, status and sexuality were closely tied in Lister's self-production. With her change of fortunes, Lister's amorous aspirations were directed towards women of higher social status and she modified her conduct accordingly. The content of the crypt hand diary too shifted to encompass different attitudes and expectations. For instance, a diary entry for 17 November 1831, when Lister was overwintering in Hastings with Vere Hobart, depicts Lister taking a role that, relative to earlier accounts of amorous relationships, was unusually passive:

*I had been in good spirits after dinner which she rather ch[e]cked so I shut my eyes & dozed while she played & was very quiet afterwards just before going to bed she took from the bosom of her gown ... a paper containing three little curls of her hair saying somehow or other while she shewed & held them out to me she did not want them I took the paper put it into the breast of my gown saying you will never see these again ... (SH: 7/ML/E).*

The narrative focus has swung in the direction of Vere Hobart, with Lister as the rather nervous and admiring narrator, surveying and recording Hobart's words and actions but less frequently offering open analysis and interpretation of them. This is implicit in the

tone and in the carelessly worded rather jumbled construction of the passages, as in this encoded entry for 20 November 1831:

*... told Miss H while at the piano that as to our talk of Salona it was a facon de parler for other things meaning living together but as to our going to Naples it was within the pale of possibility that I could not go that I could but do one of two things she could not understand this if not on account of my father I said perhaps I should tell before the first of April I meant that perhaps before next winter I must decide whether to take M[arianna] or give her up before coffee Miss H talk [ed] more than usual of herself & Charles Stuart thinks his serious love gone off by this time perhaps if not she may be won spite of her objection of his seven years younger & being her cousin ... (SH: 7/ML/E).*

Lister observes this quiet, reserved tone in both encoded and unencoded diary entries throughout her sojourn with Hobart. The acerbic language and rapid pace of the earlier diary which she so often employed to define her social identity has given way to a measured, leisurely but less self-assured style, in which Lister is constructed as the supplicant.

As Lister, and the diary, grew older, heavier, so the narrative gathered around its author. Lister found a life-companion in Anne Walker, with whom she spent a considerable amount of time in travel. She invested money and energy in redesigning Shibden Hall as a great estate, while juggling the income from its gradually depleted industrial and agricultural resources. Unsurprisingly the diary slowly became a little less orientated towards the erotic, the amorous, the exotic, and instead leant more towards reinscribing Lister's social position and historicizing her self-narrative. It became more focused on the experience of everyday living, daily expenses, servants, ailments, the conduct of her personal relationships. At the same time, the community of women that

had established itself around Lister began to disintegrate. Raine was committed to an insane asylum and became 'poor Eliza'; Tib Norcliffe drank too much and grew stout and grumpy; Marianna Belcombe married and in the end became rather fond of her husband. Lister's communication with the women of this early network collapsed and the cipher lost its currency.

Lister wrote as a young woman that if she were to 'set my things to rights as they ought to be, 'tis high time to begin if I mean to get it done in my lifetime' and there is a powerful sense in the later diary of this project broadening and slowing as it neared its end (Whitbread 1988: 16). Lister, indeed, did not expect to die when she did and had no conception that her literary task, and life, would end so soon.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, her ordering, accounting and editing of the diary, indicates her preparedness for this eventuality. A diary by its very nature is finite, and always has to be 'done in my lifetime'.

### Conclusion

The crypt hand, then, has many and varied functions. It hides diary entries from casually prying eyes, while giving access to them to the privileged holders of the key. It signposts to writer and reader movement into a different textuality *and*, at times, sexuality, a symbolic page turned down; it provides a site for a discourse on woman-to-woman sexuality, and creates an intimacy and exclusivity among keyholders that constitutes in effect a secret society. This itself charges the crypt hand with an aura of eroticism, mystery and even transgression and elevates its significance. Textually, its presence

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<sup>14</sup> Lister's diary ends about 6 weeks before her death in Koutais in the Caucasus mountains on 22 September 1840. She died of a fever probably contracted from a tick-bite.



creates a tension between unencoded and encoded material and raises a number of questions. Can we assume that the complete absence of code in correspondence between Lister and certain female acquaintances like Miss Marsh, for instance, indicates that their relationship was not amorous in any way? And did Lister consider the subject-matter of passages in crypt hand to be more intimate or more important than that which was not written in crypt hand?

I have argued that the intertwining of Lister's encoded and unencoded diary relied not so much on binary oppositions as on her developing individuated and relational self-narrative; that the two different modes might encompass similar material while embodying different attitudes, or even vice versa, that similar attitudes may expressed towards different areas of life. Many of these shifts are very subtle. Lister assembles contiguous yet disparate thoughts and ideas together within the same passage, moving, apparently seamlessly, from one to the other. She abandons the cipher for her unencoded writing and returns again to the cipher, weaving her self-narrative from the different strands. This enables her to take up several attitudes or narrative positions at the same time.<sup>15</sup> The two modes are flexible and interdependent and Lister is equally fluent in both.

Only a sixth of the diary is in crypt hand. The letters contain an even smaller proportion of encoded material. It would appear from an examination of the content of encrypted and unencrypted text that neither mode is privileged over the other, nor one embedded within the other. Yet the sudden transition from unencrypted to encrypted

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<sup>15</sup> Her writing about menstruation is an example of how she could hold several apparently conflicting points-of-view simultaneously. She recounted how much she disliked her menstrual periods being noted: '[Mrs Barlow] lets me see too much that she considers me too much as a woman. She talks to me about being unwell. I have aired napkins before her. She feels me, etc. All which I like not. Marianna never seems to know or notice these things' (Whitbread 1992: 88). This dislike did not prevent her writing in detail, in cipher, about them, when they occurred, how heavy they were, how often she had to change her bloodied garments and so on. '*No kiss quarter hour washing much cousin [menstrual period] ... went to my dressing room at two & twenty minutes & washed much cousin then*' (SH: 7/ML/E, 29 January 1836).

writing *is* startling, and the reader, and presumably writer, have to cross a mental frontier in moving from one to the other, just as a shift from one language to another requires. However fluent reader and writer may be in both modes, an adjustment has to be made. Furthermore, the crypt hand is visually demanding; it invites examination.

Lister's own rationalization of her use of the cipher interestingly combines many of the functions I have outlined in this chapter. She wrote in 1833, '*What a comfort my journal is. How I can write in crypt all as it really is and throw it off my mind and console myself. Thank God for it*' (quoted in Brothers, 1996: 119). Lister seems to suggest that her cipher provides her with a space into which she can '*throw*' '*all as it really is*'. The words '*all as it really is*' have embodied within them the idea of an all that is not '*as it really is*'. However, it is significant that it is the '*all as it really is*' that is to be cast so violently into that safe, therapeutic, unjudgemental, textual space of the cipher. She had, however, already allowed the possibility of a readership of her encrypted diary by giving out copies of the key to her lovers, who although they were not authorized to read the text were supplied with the means should the occasion arise, creating a thrilling intimacy between subject and reader. '*All as it really is*' has not been thrown into oblivion, but conveniently stored and saved. Something that will not be sought does not need to be hidden, while the act of concealment may itself construct what has been buried as treasure, and produce and encourage a seeker.

Lister was twenty-five when she wrote the crypt hand diary entry, quoted in the Introduction, '*expatiated on the nature of my feelings towards [Anne Belcombe] and hers towards me*' (SH:M/L/E). As I described there, passages employing the cipher are much easier to read than those in her cramped plaintext hand, despite the running together of words and the absence of punctuation. This is because the symbols are printed out, each one distinguishable from the next, like a child's early letters, whereas her 'ordinary'

writing shows the evidence of practised usage. Lister had been using the cipher since 1806, but the distinction between this carefully produced script and her often illegible plaintext hand suggests that it still required an effort to write it. Complex ciphers have generally been used for simple short messages of the ‘meet-me-at-dawn’ variety. It seems typical of Lister’s enjoyment of and dedication to the craft of writing, and her alertness to the nuances of self-construction, that she should laboriously print out a euphonious and onomatopoeic term like ‘*expatiated on*’, loaded with self-ironising meaning, instead of simply writing ‘spoke of’. The latter would be easier and quicker to write, but would communicate something less interesting.



## Chapter 4. Love and 'erotics': The Amatory Author

Lesbian history has characteristically been represented as one of silence, discontinuity and absence. In the 1970s, Adrienne Rich drew attention to the 'silence and lies' by which 'women's love for women' has been suppressed (Rich, 1980: 190). But recent lesbian scholarship has gone a long way towards revealing some of those hidden connections and secrets. Lillian Faderman, in *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (1981), argues that the eighteenth-century fashion for romantic friendship 'dictated that women may fall in love with each other, though they must not engage in genital sex' (Faderman, 1991: 74).<sup>1</sup> More recently, Martha Vicinus, observing 'a paradoxical tendency [among writers of lesbian history] ... to be both reticent to name women's same-sex desire and overeager to categorize and define women's sexual behaviour' (Vicinus, 1996: 2), again warns that lesbian history consists largely of 'nuances, masks, secrecy, and the unspoken' (Vicinus, 1996: 235).

Emma Donoghue's persuasive study of medical, legal and literary sources documenting lesbian experience and expression, *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801* (1993), moves away from the emphasis upon 'silences' and commits itself to

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<sup>1</sup> But Anne Lister was herself sceptical of the much-vaunted celibacy of one of the most famous romantic friendships of the period, that of the Ladies of Llangollen, who, Terry Castle argues, emblemize 'the kind of depressingly chaste female-female bonding' described by Faderman (Castle, 1993: 106). Lister wrote after visiting their home: '[I] hesitate to pronounce such attachments uncemented by something more tender still than friendship' (Whitbread, 1988: 210).

‘dispelling the myth that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century lesbian culture was rarely registered in language and that women who fell in love with women had no words to describe themselves’: Lister’s writings, Donoghue argues, provide ‘a good example’ of how women were able to articulate their sexual relationships with women (Donoghue, 1993: 3).

Intense debate still surrounds the question of whether homosexuality was recognized as constituting an individuated or social identity in any period before the late nineteenth century. This subject has notably been interrogated by Michel Foucault who argued that it was not until homosexuality was categorized as a pathological condition in the late nineteenth century that it was recognized as a distinctive ‘sexual sensibility’:

the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized - Westphal’s famous article of 1870 [Archiv für Neurologie] on “contrary sexual sensations” can stand as its date of birth - less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility (Foucault, 1990: 43).

The categorization of homosexual identity, Foucault proposes, reinforced existing power relations; the defining of the experience of same-sex sexual relations within a repressive discourse also controlled and limited it. In recent years this argument has preoccupied historians and scholars of homosexual literature and has become entangled with what Terry Castle calls the ‘no-sex-before-1900’ school of thought (Castle, 1993: 93), which, extrapolating from Faderman’s argument that there is little of evidence of sexual relations in romantic friendships, concludes that no such relations existed. This conflation of theoretical positions has sometimes led to the supposition that women in the early nineteenth century neither conceived of any definable sexual *identity* beyond their procreative biology, nor acted out sexual relations with one another. By Foucault’s account

above, Lister simply adopted particular conduct and appearance in order to denote her willingness to engage in certain uncategorized 'sexual relations', rather than because she had a 'sexual sensibility'. And had her encrypted diary not been deciphered, it could also have been assumed that her intimacies with women did not encompass the possibility of sexual relations.<sup>2</sup>

The problematics of these arguments are widely discussed elsewhere. Donoghue, for example, takes Foucault to task for inaccuracies in his terminology,<sup>3</sup> while Susan J. Wolfe and Julia Penelope accuse Foucault of constructing 'a fortuitous history ... in which some discourses (men's) are privileged while other's (women's) are silenced' (Wolfe and Penelope, 1993: 16). Anne Ferguson, who has expressed concern that 'a gay male historian like Foucault cannot be trusted to have got the periodisation of these "epistemic ruptures" correct, as his main concern has not been with understanding structures of male domination' (Ferguson, 1989: 71), has herself been the subject of criticism by Wolfe and Penelope for producing a definition that 'restricts the term *Lesbian* to those of us who have lived in the twentieth century' (Wolfe and Penelope, 1993: 21). The term 'lesbian' has also been rejected as anachronistic when applied to earlier periods. Judith C. Brown proposes that because 'the word "lesbian" appears once in the work of Brantôme, [and] was not commonly used until the nineteenth [century]', *lesbian* sexuality did not exist in renaissance times (Brown, 1986: 17). However, the subtitle of her own book is *The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy*. On the other hand, Donoghue argues convincingly that the word 'lesbian' was in use in seventeenth-century France in a form recognizable today. She writes, for example, that in Pierre de Brantôme's *Lives of Gallant Ladies* (1665) 'it soon becomes clear that by "Dames Lesbiennes" Brantôme means more than the

<sup>2</sup> I do not assume that Lister necessarily acted out all that she wrote, but simply that by writing about sexual engagements with women she demonstrates the possibility of their existence.

<sup>3</sup> 'Michel Foucault argues that only the late nineteenth-century "homosexual" was thought of as a "species", but note that in 1750 [George] Arnauld is referring to the "species" of tribades' (Donoghue, 1993: 51).

women of the Greek island, since he explains that these “Lesbiennes” (mostly portrayed as bisexual) can be found in such countries as Italy, Spain, Turkey and France’ (Donoghue, 1993: 254). Occasionally in this chapter, I employ the term ‘lesbian’ in relation to Lister and her circle. Despite the reservations of some writers about its historical application, it offers, I propose, no greater difficulties than other historically located terms like, for example, marriage or childhood, whose specific meanings have also shifted over the centuries. Current meanings attached to childhood might be said to bear little relation to experience and identity before the mid-nineteenth century and yet we use the term comfortably as a general designation without feeling that readers will be perplexed by historical misunderstandings. Here I use the word ‘lesbian’ as a convenient shorthand for women who have sexual relations with, and whose central emotional focus is upon, women, while recognizing that its meaning is subject to variation.

A study of Lister’s diary can contribute significantly to the continuing debate about the history of lesbian sexuality. In it she consciously explores and interprets her sexual feelings and actions, which she felt she shared in common with others. Her research and self-examination led her to conclude that she ‘love[d] and only love[d] the fairer sex and thus, beloved by them in turn, my heart revolts from any other love than theirs’ (Whitbread, 1988:145), evidence, I suggest, of a distinct ‘sexual sensibility’.<sup>4</sup> The literary account of sexual relations between women she provides may or may not correlate to her actual practice. Its presence in a literary form, however, locates it within a discourse whose existence has hitherto been doubted.

This chapter investigates Lister’s account of her amorous relationships, the language with which she expressed her sexual feelings and experience, and her attitudes to and presentation of lesbian sexuality. It asks whether she experienced her sexuality in an

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<sup>4</sup> See also my essay on Lister and the construction of lesbian sexuality (Rowanchild, 2000c).



atmosphere of silence and discontinuity, or whether she encountered a sense of lesbian community both locally and in wider historical and cultural terms. Finally, it assesses the significance of Lister's diary to the continuing debates about women's sexuality in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

### School, 'solitary vice', and sexual love

The earliest indication that Lister's diary and letters are concerned with her sexuality arise in 1806, just after she left Manor School, York, where she met Eliza Raine. Their affair continued sporadically until the end of 1814.

Lister's contemporaries would not have been surprised to learn that she had been introduced to sexual experience while at boarding school. Girls' schools of the eighteenth century were widely rumoured to be seething hotbeds of sexual misconduct. Francis Foster claimed in 1779 that their influence on girls was ruinous: 'they infallibly pollute their Minds, and initiate them in Vice' (quoted in Harvey, 1994: 116), a point elaborated upon by James Lackington in *Two letters, on the Bad Consequences of Having Daughters educated at Boarding Schools* (1804):

The girls are often corrupted by the abandoned servant maids who now get into most houses ... If the school be large, it is ten to one but some of the girls have overheard hints, or discovered something improper either in the servants, or their brothers, or books, which they have communicated the first opportunity to their school fellows ... it is well known that many, very many, of those unhappy females that are now sunk so deep in vice and infamy, and the worst degree of misery, had their pure minds first tainted at *Boarding Schools* (quoted in Harvey, 1994: 116-7).

It was partly their reputation for careless immorality that led Mary Wollstonecraft, who, for a time in the 1780s, ran a school at Newington Green, London, to oppose single-sex boarding-schools. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), she writes of the ‘bad habits which females acquire when they are shut up together’, and of her horror at the ‘beastliness’ into which girls, as well as boys, sank when ‘a number of them pig together in the same bedchamber’ (Wollstonecraft, 1992: 288-9). It was common practice for pupils to share rooms, and even, sometimes, beds.<sup>5</sup> Jane Austen attended a school in Reading where girls slept six to a room (Tomalin, 1998: 42). At Manor School, Lister and Raine slept in the room above the chapel with Miss Burn and Miss Manners. Raine had the least comfortable position under the slope of the roof. Six other rooms accommodated between three and eight pupils. Around forty girls attended the school in 1805 when Anne Lister made her inventory (SH: 7/ML/13) and there was probably plenty of scope for exchanged intimacies as well as for the most commonly deplored adolescent vice, masturbation. A.D. Harvey attributes the eighteenth-century hysteria surrounding this practice to an anonymous publication early in the century: ‘A new orthodoxy had established itself in England, largely as a result of a best-selling, oft-revised work entitled *Onania; or the heinous sin of self-pollution, and all its frightful consequences in both sexes considered*, first printed in 1708’ (Harvey, 1994: 118). Its main concern was the evil effects of masturbation in men, but its title makes clear that its strictures applied to both sexes. Women were warned of the dangers of ‘*barrenness*, by a venereal indifference, and at length a total ineptitude to the act of generation itself’ (quoted in Harvey, 1994: 119). Masturbation (probably the ‘beastliness’ to which Wollstonecraft alludes) was reinscribed not only as unhealthy but as immoral.

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<sup>5</sup> Claire Tomalin cites the case of Arthur Young’s daughter, Bobbin, who ‘shared a “vile” small bed with a deaf girl who would lie on one side only, forcing Bobbin into excruciating discomfort. ... “She abhorred school,” her father wrote after her early death’ (Tomalin, 1998: 34).

These ideas persisted into the nineteenth century and beyond and were subscribed to, at least in theory, by Lister herself. But while the sexual feelings and practices of same-sex relationships might be expected to be the subject of a similar and associated stigma, Lister skilfully separated the two things into distinct categories. In a diary entry of 13 November 1816, she recounts her justification of her sexual desires to her lover, Anne Belcombe. Acknowledging the '*wickedness said to be practised by girls at schools*', Lister defines this as '*quite different*' from the lovemaking women engaged in, for it might involve '*making use of instruments*'. She cites as an example of the dangers of such a procedure '*the girl in Dublin who was obliged to have a surgeon extract a stick from her*', describing it further as a '*secret & solitary vice ... that I abhorred*'. In this entry she provides an acid commentary on her lover's response to the harangue: '*in naming my peculiar detestation of solitary vice Anne suddenly exclaimed surely you dont suspect me of that in a tone & manner that at once convinced me she had been a culprit*' (SH: 7/ML/E). Lister, in self-justifying mode reminiscent of Rousseau's *Confessions*, both admits to and acquits herself of this 'vice' in numerous entries such as '*incurred a cross [orgasm] thinking of M[arianna] just before getting up*' (SH: 7/ML/E, 6 February 1832), or even '*incurred a cross sitting on my chair it somehow came suddenly not thinking particularly of anyone till lastly of M[arianna]*' (SH: 7/ML/E, 25 November, 1831). Presumably '*not thinking*' implied a lack of active participation in the event and thus exonerated her of conscious volition in her enjoyment.

Lister's ability to encompass, and rationalize, her desires in her literary production is evident from her earliest literary exchanges with Eliza Raine. In the first few years after leaving school, they corresponded almost daily, exchanged Valentines and shared secrets (including the crypt-hand alphabet), and met regularly. Lister's formulaic letters to Raine during this period are charged with coded meanings. The line 'distracted to lose you I sigh

and lament me in vain fully verifying the old Proverb that the more you have the more you would have' (SH: 7/ML/A/1), penned by Lister in 1806 just after she left Raine behind at the Manor School, may sound like copybook prose but has additional erotic resonances. Raine's diary entry for August 1810 suggests that the path of true love was not always easy: '*Dear L and I had a reconciliation*'; '*L & I had a difference [that] ... left me e[x]ceedingly ill*'; '*my husband came to me & finally a happy reunion was accomplished*', and finally, and perhaps inevitably, '*an altercation took place between Mrs L & her daughter*' (SH: 7/ML/A/14). Raine's use of 'husband' indicates the sexual nature of their relationship, but also constructs Raine as the subordinate partner. Lister later employs the word 'wife' to describe a later lover, Marianna Belcombe, and calls herself 'husband' (Whitbread, 1988: 121). She may already have seen herself taking a masculine role in certain respects. In her letters and diary, Lister usually refers to Raine as Eliza, prefaced by various endearments, while Raine addresses Lister, either *as* Lister (SH: 7/ML/A/30) or by her gender-ambiguous pet-name, Welly (SH: 7/ML/A/37).<sup>6</sup> In later years, Marianna Belcombe bestowed on Lister the affectionate, but unambiguously masculine nickname, Fred (Whitbread, 1988: 89).

Lister masculinizes her role in relationships throughout the diary and in correspondence. For example, when her sexual suit to her eventual life-partner, Anne Walker, seemed to be failing, she complained that Walker '*wants better manning than I can manage*' (Liddington, 1998: 85, emphasis in original). Again, when she briefly considered Isabella 'Tib' Norcliffe as a possible life-companion, she attached specific conditions to this arrangement: 'I said ... that I must have someone who had the same authority in my house as a wife would have in her husband's house' (Whitbread, 1988: 92). The gendered terms

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<sup>6</sup> A nickname derived presumably from Lord Wellington, a great favourite of many young women of the period, including the Brontë sisters, who adored the exaggerated Gothic masculinity of his noble swashbuckling style, appearance and reputation (see Barker, 1994: 155).

she chooses for their possible roles may be a convenient shorthand, but again place Lister within the masculine and her proposed partner within the feminine sphere.

Lister was nineteen and Norcliffe twenty-five when Raine introduced them. Norcliffe's family owned Langton Hall, an estate of around 2,500 acres near Malton in the Vale of York, and Lister enjoyed the social benefits from such a liaison. Their affair began in 1810 and ran desultorily for many years, finally petering out in the late 1820s as Lister reconsidered Norcliffe's suitability as a possible partner. She continued to write, however, of their spending nights together. In 1821, for example, a year after Lister's pronouncing the match impossible, she 'slept with [Norcliffe] at the Black Swan [Halifax]' and received 'A kiss of Tib, both last night & this morning ... but she cannot give me much pleasure & I think we are equally calm in our feelings on these occasions' (Whitbread, 1988: 170). She expressed distaste at Norcliffe's personal habits of taking snuff-taking, snoring, 'taking so much wine [that it] was generally known & lamented by all her friends' (Whitbread, 1988: 139), and her blunt provocative manner, 'Tib is, indeed, shockingly barefaced' (Whitbread, 1988: 135). Despite 'poor Tib, ... preferring me to all the rest of her friends' (Whitbread, 1988: 140), Lister reiterates throughout her diary that 'She does not suit me' (Whitbread, 1988: 98), and reports York gossip of 1825 that 'two Jacks would not suit together', referring presumably to Tib's masculine demeanour (Whitbread, 1992: 127).<sup>7</sup>

While Lister was accumulating the masculine accoutrements, manly nickname, pistols and sword, during her teenage years, she continued to receive attentions from male suitors. Miss Marsh's letter of 24 September 1814 conveys the interest of Captain Philip Taylor: 'in short my dear Girl, it is plain he would give his Ears and Eyes for you (SH: 7/ML/59).' A diary entry for January 1821 describes Lister burning 'several very old' letters including

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<sup>7</sup> M.E. Kendall reports that 'some people used to call [Lister] Gentleman Jack, I suppose on account of her fearless character' (Kendall, 1950: 69).

‘Mr Montagu’s farewell verses that no trace of any man’s affection may remain’ (Whitbread, 1988: 145). This is probably the same Mr Montagu of whom Raine wrote to Lister in July 1812, ‘If I am to marry, Montagu must be my Husband’ (SH: 7/ML/A/42). In the same letter, Raine describes the hapless but flattering suit of Captain Alexander.<sup>8</sup> Lister’s appears unmoved by those declarations. Her attachment to Raine had waned, though she was still in receipt of generous gifts of cash from her lover, which she refers to in crypt-hand in letters and presumably kept secret from the world. Remarkably, Raine gave Lister copies of letters from, and to, her suitor. When the rift between Raine and Lister occurred, Raine wrote to Lister that ‘I shall be obliged to you to collect Capt Alexander’s letters to you, to me, & mine that you may have, to him’, suggesting that Lister was already beginning to construct the archive of letters and written material that was to play an important part in the production and management of her self (SH: 7/ML/A/90).<sup>9</sup> Raine’s mental breakdown and committal to an insane asylum in 1814 was later ascribed by Miss Marsh to the loss of Lister’s good opinion (SH: 7/ML/59). Lister herself wrote that ‘we had once agreed to go off together when of age but my conduct first delayed it & then circumstances luckily put an end to it altogether’ (Whitbread, 1992: 49). ‘Luckily’ presumably refers to Lister’s escape from a long-term relationship with Raine; there was nothing lucky for Raine in the ‘circumstances’ that ‘put an end an end’ to their plans.

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<sup>8</sup> Capt. Alexander turns up as a beneficiary of Raine’s will, though this was considered invalid (SH: 7/ML/93).

<sup>9</sup> It seems from this request that Captain Alexander had also corresponded with Lister about his suit for marriage with Raine.

### **Lister and love: the Belcombe sisters**

Marianna Belcombe, the daughter of the doctor in charge of the York asylum to which Eliza Raine was eventually committed, was introduced to Lister by Norcliffe in 1814. Despite Belcombe's lowlier social position, Lister greatly preferred her to Norcliffe, and to Raine, by now institutionalized. She savoured the competition this evoked in her earlier lovers, keeping a letter from Miss Marsh which describes Raine's 'Hatred to the Belcombes particularly Mariana & her Ingratitude as to them all' (SH: 7/ML/64), and writing, in 1822: '[Marianna] thinks Isabel would not suit me: [She says Tib] looks fat & gross ... almost vulgar'" (Whitbread, 1988: 212).

In March 1816, Marianna Belcombe married Charles Lawton, a Cheshire landowner. She was one of five Belcombe daughters and the match was a good one. Lister expressed her feelings in carefully produced poetic imagery: '...The time, the manner, of her marriage ... Oh, how it broke the magic of my faith forever. How, spite of love, it burst the spell that bound my very reason ...' (Whitbread, 1988: 282). According to Lister's diary, their sexual relationship was not ended by Belcombe's marriage, however, and they continued to meet at each other's houses as frequently as possible. Indeed, they apparently conceived a plan that on Lawton's death (he was a good deal older than Belcombe, nearing fifty), they would live together. As a widow, Belcombe would not only be financially well provided for, but could respectably live with a female companion.

A diary entry for 19 October 1816 confirms this extraordinary scheme:

... a letter from M-/Lawton/C- in very bad humour - ill in bed, & his leg much inflamed. I find he broke "his shin", to use M-'s words/at Manchester - He worked himself into such a passion on Wed. night, he was in a high fever & delirious on

Thurs. morning - *M seems to have some hope of his taking his final leave this I fear is too good to be true* - Surely, he is a madman at times ... (SH:7/ML/E).<sup>10</sup>

Lister is understandably not as sanguine about this arrangement as her lover. While she reports Belcombe as writing, 'As long, my dear Fred, as I reign undisturbed over your heart, I am satisfied' (Whitbread, 1988: 89), she ponders her own love's endurance:

It struck me, if we should not meet for years & then, when she expected being together, if I should be disappointed with her looks, etc, seen her grow old in the service of another, could I then cordially wish to realize the scheme of earlier days? If I should, by & by, meet with anyone who would quite suit me, could I refuse & still lose a substance to expect a shadow (Whitbread, 1988: 85)?

This question of 'the service of another' was clearly painful to Lister. Belcombe was very anxious that their 'connection' should not be suspected, but after a night of 'erotics' at Shibden Hall in August 1821, Lister writes that she told her firmly that no 'casuistry' could disguise the fact that they had committed 'adultery to all intents & purposes'. Belcombe protested that it was not her relationship with Lister that was adulterous, but her marriage to Lawton, to which Lister records a trenchant reply: 'I always considered your marriage legal prostitution. We were both wrong. You to do it & I to consent to it ... nothing at all can excuse us but our prior connection' (Whitbread, 1988: 281). The language here is remarkably reminiscent of feminist rhetoric of the twentieth century. Lister makes an ideological link between marriage and prostitution that was more fully explored in works like Cicely Hamilton's *Marriage as a Trade* (1909). Lister, however, is more concerned with the particular than the general case. While unconvinced by Belcombe's protestations ('She is worldly'), the primacy she gives their relationship over Belcombe's marriage seems to be sincere (Whitbread, 1988: 281). She did indeed perceive

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<sup>10</sup> Punctuation as in original ms.



the bond between them as being as significant as the marriage bond, with lack of money the real stumbling block. She even records making a declaration to that effect to her uncle and aunt:

One thing led to another till I said plainly, in substance, that [Marianna] would not have married if she or I had had good independent fortunes. That her having C- was as much my doing as hers & that I hoped she would one day be in the Blue Room, that is, live with me. ... My uncle, as usual, said little or nothing but seemed well enough satisfied. My aunt talked, appearing not at all surprised, saying she always thought it a match of convenience (Whitbread, 1988: 189).

Lawton, however, outlived Lister, and by then Belcombe had reconciled herself to life with him. Her New Year letter of 5 January 1832 (copied into Lister's diary), reprised Lister's misgivings, and, in a sad little rider, reflected on what might have been:

*I often think of what you told me in the coach from Peterborough that I was so used to Mr L's odd ways that I should probably feel his loss more than I suspected & really my Fred it would be so & since I find that no unreasonable conduct would justify my leaving him I think I have made up my mind to put him as little in contact with my own family as I can help & in every other way to make the best of it for of an end there seems no chance C will never change ... it often seems to me if chance had been different, how comfortably our home might have been your home, but all things have turned out different from what we expected (SH: 7/ML/E).*

Although Lister often declared her passionate attachment to Belcombe, even at the height of their affair her diary reports many other flirtations, liaisons and affairs. One documented in detail was that with Anne 'Nantz' Belcombe, Marianna's sister. The index

for the diary entries detailing their ten-day visit to Buxton in 1816 shows how the encrypted progress of Lister's suit is woven into her record of daily events:

August

Wed. 14 *teazing Anne*

Th. 15 Buxton ... *excusing myself to Anne for my partiality to the ladies*

Fri. 16 Dull day at Buxton ... *contradicted all I said to Anne last night*

Sat. 17 Left Buxton ... *conduct to Anne*

Sun. 18 Sarah & the laundry maid ver. ill ...

Mon. 19 C- afraid of being thought mad ... *Anne let me look at her a lock of  
tweres hair*<sup>11</sup>

Tues. 20 *wrote M a circular for her frien[d]s*

Wed. 21 *all but connected with Anne* (SH: 7/ML/E/26/2).

Lister's diary account shows her cleverly conniving that neither sister should know of her sexual relationship with the other, writing in the index to November, 1816: '[Sat.] 23 [Anne] *does not suspect M*', and '[Mon] 25 *wrote to M- deny the affair with Anne*' (SH: 7/ML/E). Her attitude to Anne is cavalier. She admits to using her for casual sex, as this diary entry 8 November demonstrates: '*I do not admire but rather feel disgust for her she is not nice & her breath is disagreeable however her manners made me feel desire*' (SH: 7/ML/E). But she depicts Anne as being in love with her: '[Her letter] concluded, "from your ever sincere affectionate, Anne Belcombe." The seal, Cupid in a boat guided by a star. "Si je te perds, je suis perdu." I shall not think about her but get out of the scrape as well as I can, sorry & remorseful to have been in it at all. Heaven forgive me, & may M- never know it (Whitbread, 1988: 145).'

<sup>11</sup> I have not established quite what '*twere*' means here (there is no mistake in the transcription), but in later diary entries, Lister refers to exchanging locks of 'queer [pubic] hair with Marianna Belcombe (Whitbread, 1992: 131).

The dismissive tone of this entry is characteristic of the way Lister writes about Anne Belcombe. The following diary entry of 1820 adopts a Rousseauesque style in which, while purporting to reveal her own faults, she exposes Belcombe's weakness and unattractiveness, and thus excuses and explains her actions:

... went to Anne, a little before twelve & staid two hours. At first rather lover-like, reminding her of former days. I believe I could have her again in spite of all she says, if I chose to take the trouble... She let me kiss her breasts but neither she nor the room seemed very sweet to my nose. ... At last she said, 'Now you are doing all this & perhaps mean nothing at all.' Of course I fought off, bidding her only try me, but felt a little remorse-struck (Whitbread, 1988: 139).

Lister constructs herself as the irresistible old flame and Anne Belcombe as an unattractive but convenient vehicle for sexual titillation and self-flattery. The effect is to render Belcombe pitiable while reinforcing Lister's control of the narrative, and offers a pornographic approach to sexual morality, the converse of that expressed in her consideration of Marianna Belcombe's marriage.

### **Working-class girls and romantic women**

A curious aspect of Lister's account of her affairs with both Marianna and Anne Belcombe is her candid confession that she provoked their sexual jealousy by inventing non-existent lovers for herself. Two of these were supposed to be working-class girls. A diary entry for 23 November 1816 recounts how she told Anne of Marianna's suspicions about her relationship with a young woman called Miss Northern, and offers this explanation:

*Miss Northern is daughter of Northern the dentist who has lodgings at the pump she would be glad to take sewing & from my aunts proposing to send her to*

*make me some new night things I have somehow got to joke about her & threaten Anne to send for her in another capacity so that her name is now become the nickname with Anne & me for a frail companion or chere ami* (SH: 7/ML/E).

Anne Belcombe was in on this joke, but was apparently kept in the dark about another made-up lover, Sarah Binns, whom Lister discusses later in the entry: '*in explaining this exclamation attributed to M[arianna] I was led into hinting at Sarah Binns the feigned name of a girl to whom M believes & has believed for the last 2 years me to pay thirty pounds a year*' (SH: 7/ML/E). There is no evidence of Lister having affairs with lower-class women, although she obviously enjoyed the fantasy, and its ramifications. She regarded such attachments as risky, noting of a prospective servant's attractions: 'She is pretty. If it were safe to venture, fancied I might visit her occasionally &, if I could contrive to have the house clear, might manage matters' (Whitbread, 1988: 237).

Lister's other make-believe lover during this period was known enigmatically as Carmarthen (or Caermarthen), to whom she pretended to Anne to be 'engaged'. Her diary entry for 27 November 1816 tells how '*before we got into bed we had a long conversation about Carmarthen the name accidentally given to the girl to whom I have told Anne I am engaged saying she lived there thinking in fact of Miss Justice tho at the same time veiling my engagement to M[arianna] in this mystery*' (SH: 7/ML/E). Whether or not Lister employed the term 'engagement' in conversation with Anne, its appearance in her diary, both for her feigned relationship with 'Carmarthen' and her actual one with Marianna Belcombe, shows how she attempted to rationalise her life choices, placing them within the parameters of social convention.

The wry tone of the extracts above suggests that Lister derived amusement and satisfaction from her literary production of herself as someone capable of deceiving two sisters at once, even while convincing each that she is privileged above the other. If Lister

indeed experienced the events described, the entertainment they occasioned would be greatly enhanced by their careful literary production, which could be relived both in the writing and reading. Whether the events were real or imaginary, Lister constructs the diary as a safe confidante, *as though* the material is dangerous, and produces an interesting literary conceit in which she authenticates the candour of her feelings for two (presumably) real lovers by confessing to deceiving them with two made-up ones.

All five Belcombe sisters, Marianna, Harriet, Anne, Louisa (Lou), and Eliza (Eli), were the objects of Lister's amorous interest. A diary entry for 8 November 1816 recounts how she told Anne Belcombe that she had sexual feelings towards 'her sister Eliza ... saying that I admired her as a pretty girl' (SH: 7/ML/E).<sup>12</sup> She later considered 'sleeping with Eliza Belcombe' (Whitbread, 1988: 179). She refers frequently to receiving encouragement from Louisa.<sup>13</sup>

Harriet, regarded as a scandalous flirt, was unhappily married to an army officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Milne.<sup>14</sup> During the winter of 1825-6, Lister describes a whirlwind flirtation with her, recording an exchange of letters that challenges the assumption that the language of romantic friendship, used so frequently in female correspondence, was entirely devoid of sexual content. Lister immediately identifies the import of Mrs Milne's letters:

Letter ... from Mrs Milne (Scarboro'). A regular love letter. '... Since I saw you last you have occupied every moment of my time. You dwell in my heart and in my head. In my waking & sleeping hours you are with me & to banish

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<sup>12</sup> This disingenuous confession was supposedly intended to divert from Anne Belcombe's attention from her longstanding relationship with Marianna.

<sup>13</sup> For example, she was informed by Lou Belcombe that 'she liked me ... [and] would rather have my love than my esteem' (Whitbread, 1988: 72), and writes of a discussion with Marianna in which '[I] hinted not at [Lou] asking if I had transferred my affections to her' (Whitbread, 1992: 124).

<sup>14</sup> Lister wrote in 1818 that 'she was the best flirt she had ever seen', and, in 1820, Marianna told Lister that 'Harriet's flirting was terrible' (Whitbread, 1992: 147).

you seems so utterly impossible that my brain turns at the idea of the influence you have gained over me (Whitbread, 1992: 152).

The words with which Lister sums up the letter makes it clear what kind of affection is being exchanged here: 'The above is the whole of the letter, verbatim ... It rather excites me. I might have her on my own terms. 'Tis well I have not a penis. I could never be continent' (Whitbread, 1992: 152). Indeed, Mrs Milne excited Lister considerably and the style she employed in her diary demonstrates the pleasure she took in the literary exposition of her feelings:

Sunday 1 Jan ... At 10¼, sent down my letter to the post. Troubled in my mind about what I had written. Could not say my prayers. The wickedness stared me in the face ... Dressed. Finding George [servant] had not gone ... recalled my letter ... The devil, rather than God, seemed nearer when I attempted to pray ... Could think of nothing but Mrs Milne & my letter. Intently anxious - afraid of committing myself & of being in her power ... Wrote the copy of another letter ... that I could not resist her fascination. Saw the brink on which I was standing. Trembled at the sight & was wretched. '... Accustomed only to your indifference, that sudden burst of kindness was more fatal than the electric bolt of lightning ... what have you done to me, Harriet?' (Whitbread, 1992: 153).

Lister names Milne's letter as a love letter. The effect it has upon her is to excite her sexual feelings, hence the 'love' referred to here may be construed as sexual love. The language, style and tone of the letter is, therefore, capable of a sexual interpretation. Lister responds with a letter couched in a similar literary vein. The language she uses is perhaps more dramatic and hyperbolic than Milne's, even though she expresses herself as cautious in her display of passion. Yet this literary approach is one that Faderman characterizes in *Surpassing the Love of Men* as indicative of romantic, or in her clumsy terminology,

‘ungenital’ friendship, or, at least of providing no evidence to the contrary (Faderman, 1991: 107). One of Faderman’s examples, a letter sent by Elizabeth Carter, the eighteenth-century bluestocking, to the writer, Catherine Talbot, is framed in terms remarkably like those of Lister and her lover:

Nobody has been observed to lose their way, run against a door, or sit silent and staring in a room full of company in thinking upon you, except my solitary self, who ... have the advantage of looking half mad when I do not see you, and ... extremely silly when I do (Faderman, 1991: 127).

Faderman is careful to avoid the conclusion that such expressions suggest sexual, or genital, desire: ‘What romantic friends wanted was to share their lives, to confide in and trust and depend upon each other’ (Faderman, 1991: 142).<sup>15</sup> Lister’s diary, however, shows that such language could indicate a very different kind of ambition. A contemplation of Milne’s letters leads her to the following fantasy scenario:

Thinking of Mrs Milne. Fancying I had a penis & was intriguing with her in the downstairs water-closet at Langton before breakfast, to which she would have made no objection. I shall never forget her way of saying, just before we parted, ‘You have me’ (Whitbread, 1992: 153).

The particular sexual significance of that ‘You have me’ is lost without the preceding sentence, and suggests what is missing from Faderman’s discussion, which was written before the popularization of Lister’s diary by Whitbread’s *I Know My Own Heart* (1988): a context in which women’s correspondence could be construed as sexually suggestive.

Regardless of whether or not the Lister/Milne correspondence took place outside Lister’s

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<sup>15</sup> Liz Stanley counters Faderman’s claim that the Ladies of Llangollen had a romantic friendship that contemporary society accepted as unsexual and natural by quoting Hester Thrale’s diary observation that the Ladies were ‘damned sapphists’ whom it was not safe for women to visit overnight unless accompanied by men (Stanley, 1992: 218).

diary account of it, Lister demonstrates that the language and style of such letters is open to this interpretation.<sup>16</sup>

### Sexual experience and erotic language

Lister's account of her affair with Mrs Milne clearly counters Faderman's claim that 'For the most part, English writers seemed not to have been very aware of the possibility of sex without a penis. ... The educated ... might have acknowledged that women of hot climes could invent all manner of lechery, but many would have doubted that English women were so inclined' (Faderman, 1991: 27). But Lister did not write in a vacuum and Donoghue adduces evidence from a number of texts available in the eighteenth century, including eleven 'homegrown British', to demonstrate the existence of material explicitly recounting 'sexual possibilities between women', including Cleland's novel, *Fanny Hill* (Donoghue, 1993: 183). Did Lister derive her erotic language from those mostly male-authored texts, from contemporary slang, or did she employ a particular personal idiom?

Thomas Lacqueur argues in *Making Sex* (1992) that sometime during the eighteenth century the female orgasm was 'banished to the borderlines of physiology, a signifier without a signified' (Lacqueur, 1992: 150). This proposition does not, however, appear to be supported by Lister's diary, in which orgasm features as significantly central. She uses a number of different expressions to denote orgasm, including euphemisms, as in, for example, 'A strong excitement last night just after getting into bed' (Whitbread, 1992: 85, my emphasis), 'one good one last night' (Liddington, 1998: 102, my emphasis), 'I can give

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<sup>16</sup> In another example, Elaine Miller has shown how biographers of Charlotte Brontë have assumed that her correspondence with Ellen Nussey must be based on friendship, even though it uses the language of sexual love: 'What shall I do without you? ... Why are we to be divided? Surely, Ellen, it must be because we are in danger of loving each other too well ...' (Miller, 1989: 35). Again, Elizabeth Mavor has characterized the relationship of the Ladies of Llangollen as 'Edenic it seems before such friendships could be biologically and thus prejudicially defined' (Mavor, 1973: xvii), but the style and language of the diary, in which Eleanor Butler addresses Sarah Ponsonby as 'the beloved of my Soul' (Mavor, 1986: 129), might also be interpreted as indicating a sexual attachment.



you *relief*' (Whitbread, 1992: 85, my emphasis), or even the pronoun 'it', whose meaning is implied by the context: 'She said ... it was the best she had ever had' (Whitbread, 1992: 85).

The word that most commonly appears in Lister's accounts of relational sex is *kiss*, explained variously by Whitbread as 'the euphemism in those days for sexual intercourse' (Whitbread, 1988: 368n), and by Liddington as 'orgasm'. The first usage is illustrated by the phrase '*had a long but rather lazy kiss last night*' (SH: 7/ML/E); '*had two kisses last night*' indicates the second (SH: 7/ML/E). My own transcriptions suggest that the word may be amenable to either usage, but that another possible translation, encompassing both variants, would be '[a] fuck', for Lister uses 'kiss' like the French word 'baiser', to mean both fucking, and kissing in its more conventional sense: 'I made an excuse to kiss Miss Browne on her lips, a very little, moistly' (Whitbread, 1988: 97).<sup>17</sup> 'Fuck' is a gendered word whose masculine connotations assume sexual intercourse to include the male orgasm (though not the female which is rendered by the passive 'to be fucked'). Lister's employment of 'kiss' observes this usage rather than the gender-neutral one of 'baiser', as this example from her diary of 27 November 1816 illustrates: '[I] said I would kiss her [Anne Belcombe] as long as she was young & agreeable' (SH: 7/ML/E). She sometimes uses the same construction in writing of her lovers' experience: '*Anne gave me a good kiss last night*' (SH: 7/ML/E). As Lister presents herself as the active partner in love-making, I understand that in this context she means that a kiss is rather *given up* by her partner than *given to* her by them. She reports with distaste the offer from her lover, Mrs Barlow, to 'give you relief', and to 'do to you as you do to me'. Lister's rejection of Mrs Barlow's advances and acid observation that 'Marianna will suit me better. I cannot do much for

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<sup>17</sup> Lister reports a complaint by a fellow guest at her Paris pension in 1824 about 'impudent' Frenchmen: 'They are all alike, at least all I have seen. Always something about "baiser"' (Whitbread, 1992: 14).

Mrs Barlow except with my finger' makes clear her desire to reposition herself as the controlling partner (Whitbread, 1992: 85). 'Fuck', however, has, as I have suggested, stronger associations with the male orgasm than is implied by 'kiss', and, despite Lister's claim to masculine attributes, her writing shows no interest in the experience of ejaculation. Nevertheless, the quality of her partner's 'kiss' is often assessed and ascribed a value: '*a very good kiss*', or '*a rather lazy kiss*' (SH: 7/ML/E, November); '*a tolerable kiss*' (Liddington, 1998: 118); '*pretty good kiss*' (Liddington, 1998: 134), and the use of the word appears to be consistent with contemporary practice for Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* describes 'kiss' as obsolete Derbyshire dialect for 'to lie with a woman' (Wright, 1903).

Lister extrapolated from the slang word 'kiss' her own idiosyncratic term for orgasm. In correspondence, a kiss is usually symbolized by x (a cross). This seems, then, a likely derivation of the word Lister employed when writing about self-induced, or, sometimes, spontaneous orgasm, 'cross': '*incurred a cross sitting on my chair it somehow came on suddenly not thinking particularly of anyone till lastly of M*' (SH: 7/ML/E); '*Incurred the cross thinking of Miss W-*' (Liddington, 1998: 104). This term usefully demonstrates how important literary concerns were to Lister's self-production. 'Cross' is a unique construct derived from the visual appearance of a literary abbreviation of 'kiss'. In common parlance 'a cross' often denotes a burden or disjuncture, but for Lister it has been transmuted into a specific and pleasurable physical sensation.

Another highly expressive term, a favourite of Lister's, is 'grubble', meaning to grope with sexual intent or to sexually stimulate (what used to be called 'heavy petting'): 'She let me grubble her over her petticoats' (Whitbread, 1992: 65); '[Miss Walker] let me grubble her this morning gladly enough' (Liddington, 1994: 44). Halliwell's *Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words* notes that 'grobble' is a northern dialect word for 'poke about'

(Halliwell, 1998). Lister uses the word 'queer' or 'quere' for the female genitalia: 'kept pottering about and rubbing the surface of her queer' (Whitbread, 1992: 47), which Whitbread glosses as a distortion of the slang-word 'quim', derived from the Celtic word 'cwm', meaning cleft or valley (Whitbread, 1992: 55n). *The English Dialect Dictionary* supplies a useful alternative derivation for 'queer' from *English Mining Terms* (1830): 'a small cavity or fissure' (Wright, 1903). Lister was familiar with mining expressions from her close interest in her own mines and may have had this meaning in mind. She describes an interesting practice among her network, when she confesses that 'I had never given any of the hair of my own queer to any one, yet I had asked for & received it from others' (Whitbread, 1992: 127). It is not clear whether this term was in common usage in her circle or a personal idiosyncrasy.

A more usual eighteenth-century slang-word for female genitalia is 'cunt', but I have so far discovered only one appearance of the word in Lister's diary and then only in reporting a note sent to her by Charles Lawton regarding his wife, Marianna. The note, which Lister relayed to Anne Belcombe, apparently read: '*surely no other wife would deny her husband putting his hand up his wifes petticoats & feeling her cunt.*' Lister continues that the letter '*astonished & disgusted [Anne] not a little she could not believed [sic] him quite so brutal*' (SH: 7/ML/E, 13 November 1816). The brutality lay perhaps not only in the explication of the desired action but in the manner this was expressed. Lister apprehended the letter as designed to distress her. Charles Lawton's use of 'cunt' and the way Lister and Anne Belcombe responded to it prompts the speculation that Lister, Lawton and Belcombe understood the term to imply property or power relations between a man and his wife (and between men and women). This might explain why Lister does not use the word. Her own erotic expression and language is often woman-centred or gender-neutral. The word 'phallus', for example, means a literary or fantasy penis-substitute rather than a realistic

prosthetic, and was evidently recognized as forming part of a discourse on woman-woman sexual relations, demonstrated in, for example, the pre-seduction talk with Mrs Barlow, 'I was going to mention the use of phalli' (Whitbread, 1992: 32), and by Lister's fantasy about her lesbian friend, Miss Pickford, 'In my mind thought of her using a phallus to her friend' (Whitbread, 1988: 292). In the diary, the phallus exists as a fantasy rather than forming part of Lister's actual equipment. Although, as I have shown, Lister fantasizes about having a penis, she makes clear that this is an imaginary attribute by prefixing her remarks with words like 'fancying' ('fancying I had a penis', Whitbread, 1992: 153), or 'supposing' ('supposing myself ... having a penis, Whitbread, 1988:151). The curious tale about '*the girl in Dublin who was obliged to have a surgeon to extract a stick from her*' (SH: 7/ML/E) suggests Lister's distaste for such practices.<sup>18</sup>

A further two terms, both of which allude to Italy, offer an interesting combination of euphemism and personal idiom. '*On the amoroso*' describes her lovers' willingness to engage in sexual activity (Liddington, 1998: 97-8), and 'going to Italy', full sexual relations (Whitbread, 1992: 65). '*On the amoroso*' implies that her lovers' interests are sited in a particular geographical location, and Whitbread suggests that a similar reading of the latter term is also possible, depending on its context, for 'Anne genuinely wanted to travel to Italy' (Whitbread, 1992: 56n). The Italian trope, connecting the sense of strangeness and release associated with physical travel, and the experience of lesbian sex, lends a startling coda to the well-mapped symbolic appeal of this country for women travellers of the period.<sup>19</sup> Lister makes a startling, perhaps subconscious link between travel, sexual experience and literary ambition in an 1830 diary entry in which she declares

<sup>18</sup> This story first appears in Lister's diary on 13 November 1816, but must have made such an impression that she repeats it, in almost the same words, in a diary entry of 14 November 1824: 'I mentioned the girl at a school in Dublin that had been obliged to have surgical aid to extract the thing' (Whitbread, 1992: 50).

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Amanda Gilroy's discussion of Anna Jameson's account of her Italian travels *Diary of an Ennuyée* (1826), which 'enacts the fluid interaction of psychic and physical space' (Gilroy, 1997: 30).

her intention 'to go to Italy and write something with reference to the classics'

(Liddington, 1998: 23). Travel, like her sexuality, maintained the liminality of Lister's self-production, and freed her for a while from bounded networks. Her laconic account, of 20 November 1831, of a conversation with Vere Hobart, whom she was assiduously courting, shows the term's potential for carrying several meanings simultaneously:

*told Miss H while at the piano that as to our talk of Salona [sic] it was a facon de parler for other things meaning living together But as to going to Naples it was within the pale of possibility that I could not go ... she could not understand this if not on account of my father [who was ill] I said perhaps I should tell before the first of April I meant that perhaps before next winter I must decide whether to take M[arianna] or give her up (SH: 7/ML/E).*

If 'going to Naples' is charged with ambiguous meanings, Lister's descriptions of sexual acts could be graphically clear: 'I soon took up her petticoats so as to feel her naked thighs next to mine. Then, after kissing with my tongue in her mouth, got the middle finger of my right hand up her & grubbed her longer & better than ever ... She seemed more moist than before but really very nice' (Whitbread, 1992: 68). However, in her diary, sexual activity is frequently accompanied by verbal exposition, as in, for example, this entry for 14 November 1816:

*[Anne Belcombe] gave me a warmer kiss last night than I have ever had she said she did not feel so much pain I did not hurt her so much owned she did not dislike it & that she had pleasure with me I enlightened her on many subjects telling her the good of being moist etc. etc. & that there can be no pleasure without it (SH: 7/ML/E).*

Indeed, the technique of recounting conversation before, during and after love-making is one of the ways by which the pace of the writing is controlled, ideas and conflict

introduced and information conveyed. Lister employs all these devices of fiction-writing in the production of her self-narrative.

With a carefully produced account, Lister can claim or reclaim control when the stability of her self-production is shaken. Mrs Barlow's offer to 'give [her] relief', for instance, is rejected within the context of a shocking encounter:

In getting out of bed, [Mrs Barlow] suddenly touching my queer, I started back. 'Ah,' said she, 'that is because you are a pucelle [virgin]. I must undo that. I can give you relief. I must do to you as you do to me.' I liked not this & said she astonished me. She asked if I was angry. No, merely astonished. However, I found I could not easily make her understand my feeling on the subject & dropped the matter altogether... This is womanizing me too much. Marianna will suit me much better (Whitbread, 1992: 85).

Lister shows herself horrified by Mrs Barlow's attempt to usurp her sexual role. She reasserts control by shutting off talk of the matter and making private resolutions about any future relationship. The passage is one that demonstrates the degree of frank self-analysis Lister was prepared to entertain in her diary, for it approaches an aspect of self she rarely revealed. Although she occasionally reports herself as being in a state of excitement, '[I] became rather excited. Felt her breasts & queer a little', (Whitbread, 1992: 50), she usually concentrates on the response of her lover to her attentions. Here, Lister indicates that the taboos surrounding a revelation of the nature and quality of her own physical sensation are about to be breached.

The disgust with which Lister received Mrs Barlow's observation on the state of her hymen is exactly reversed in her report of an encounter with Marianna Belcombe.

Belcombe's doctor had told her that her womb had slipped and Lister asks to find out for

herself. She describes the occasion and its consequences in a nice mixture of clinical detail and humorous banter:

4 Sept. [1825]

... Just put up the right finger, brought it back bloodied, surprised to find no entrance into the womb. Said I really could not be quite sure but I thought Charles had never broken the membrane. It was very odd but I would feel it another time. 'Then,' said Marianna, half in wonder, half in joke, 'I am the virgin Mary still.' She said Charles had never gone higher, she thought, than an inch (Whitbread, 1992: 125).

9 Sept.

... At 12¼ Marianna and I went upstairs. Began to be on the amoroso. Pushed up my right finger. Cordingley [maid] interrupted us. At it again. Gave her a good clean kiss &, not pushing hard, merely pushing up & down - no blood flowed ... [I] said I believed I had done the business better than I had thought & she was now no longer a virgin ... My having had to do this for her seems to have delighted us both (Whitbread, 1992: 126).

The symbolism of the occasion of Marianna's deflowering is balanced against light-hearted banter and practical details. The mechanics are described with particular attention, but economically. The interruption by Lister's maid is relevant only for the suspense it provokes, and the announcement 'she was now no longer a virgin' provides an appropriately dramatic denouement to the scene.

Lister's fluency in description of sexual encounters can be accounted for not only by the episodic or narrative quality of her writing style, but also by her frank and often literal observation of physical detail. She has command of a wide range of expressive language

for sexual experience which is neither sentimental nor misogynist, and which is physiologically well-observed, educated and articulate. Although public expression of sexual passion may have been consigned to the boundaries of Lister's life, it is integrated into her textual production in a self-conscious but urbane fashion.

### **Lister and lesbian sexuality**

Martha Vicinus identifies four dominant models by which lesbian desire was defined in the eighteenth century: the 'passing' woman, often of peasant or working-class origin, who was motivated by economic necessity; the cross-dressing woman who 'conceived of love for women only in terms of the existing heterosexual paradigm', again frequently from the working-class; the 'occasional lover of women' or aristocratic libertine, and the middle-class romantic friend (Vicinus, 1996: 239-241). She argues that 'sometime early in the nineteenth century' these models, under economic, social and literary pressure, became more fluid and interchangeable, one result of which was the appearance of 'the cross-dressed masculine woman (the mannish lesbian) ..., whose primary emotional, and probably also her sexual, commitment, was to women'. Such women 'combined the outward appearance of the cross-dressed woman and the inner, emotional life of a romantic friendship'. Vicinus proposes that this 'double inheritance' was the point at which gender lost its 'theatricality' and instead was inscribed upon the body 'as a permanent identity' (Vicinus, 1996: 244). Her argument is supported by Lisa Moore's observation that the rise of domestic fiction over the eighteenth century and the coterminous shift from the idea of a socially obligated to a unique individuated self were important factors in creating sexuality as a social category (Moore, 1996: 23).



How did Lister construct her own lesbian sexuality? Did she see herself as one of the new type of lesbian who both dressed like a man and used the language of romantic friendship as a signifier to herself and others of her emotional as well as sexual intent? Ros Ballaster proposes that a continuing “underground” tradition for women who desired other women’ allowed women-in-the-know, like Lister, to recognize lesbian relations embedded in romantic friendship (Ballaster, 1994: 28), while Faderman argues that hostility to female same-sex relations only arose during this period ‘if a woman dressed like a man’, for then ‘it was assumed she behaved as a man sexually’ (Faderman, 1991: 17). Lister’s writing makes it clear that as a mannish woman she was visibly lesbian to the populace at large. But while she may have worked the concert halls and card-tables of gentrified Halifax for female partners without open opposition, and used the underground lesbian tradition for social and sexual networking, in the streets of Halifax she experienced verbal and physical harassment: ‘Some men & women declared I was a man’ (Whitbread, 1988: 64); ‘They would have it I was a man’ (Whitbread, 1988: 65); ‘three men said, as usual, “That’s a man” & one axed “Does your cock stand?”’ (Whitbread, 1988: 49).

The taunts she reports imply that the name-callers recognized Lister’s vulnerability; she supposedly dressed like and deported herself as a man, but she was not a real man because she had no penis (and therefore was unsuccessful in her attempt to usurp male power). They also hint at popular beliefs about lesbianism and hermaphrodites. During the eighteenth century para-medical treatises started to move away from one-sex, Galenic theories that posited male and female sexual organs as structurally identical (the only difference being that female genitalia were hidden inside the body) towards a rigid binary definition of unequivocal difference between the sexes. Where previously any ambiguous sexual physiology or behaviour could be comfortably accommodated by the term hermaphroditism, these now began to be viewed as a deviation from, and transgressing,

natural biological rules. It is possible that Lister's persecutors were acting on a combination of early beliefs about hermaphrodites, and the hermaphrodite's reputedly enlarged clitoris, and on later beliefs about transgression of 'natural' sexual roles.<sup>20</sup>

Lister was familiar with theories of hermaphroditism. While she described her sexual attraction to women as 'all nature' and pondered that it was also 'all the effect of the mind', she considered physiological causes: '

[I] had thought much, studied anatomy, etc. Could not find it out. Could not understand myself ... No exterior formation accounted for it. Alluded to there being an internal correspondence or likeness of some of the male or female organs of generation. Alluded to the stones not slipping thro' the ring till after birth, etc. (Whitbread, 1992: 49).

She seemed to have had in mind here Galenic anatomy which claimed that women had hidden testes with seminal ducts on each side of the uterus. She was not, however, able to discover any of these physical traits in herself, and, as she continued to rationalize her sexuality, it required constant vigilance to negotiate the narrow path between acceptance and opprobrium. In October, 1819, when she was under threat from a persistent stalker, she examined the strains occasioned by fear of homophobic attack and exhorted herself to physical and emotional resistance:

... I will never fear. Be firm. Learn to have nerve to protect myself & make the best of things. He is but a little fellow & I think I could knock him down if he should touch me. I should try. If not, whatever he said I would make no answer. Never fear. Pray against this & for God's protection & blessing, & then face the days

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<sup>20</sup> For a detailed discussion of attitudes towards hermaphroditism, see Cath Sharrock, 'Hermaphroditism; or, "the Erection of a New Doctrine": theories of female sexuality in eighteenth-century England', *Paragraph*, 17 (1994), 38-40.

undaunted. It is always a relief to me to write down what I feel ... (Whitbread, 1988:101).

The affirmation 'Learn to have nerve & make the best of things' together with calculations about 'knocking down' her pursuer show how closely she monitored her own responses and how she tried to construct an emotional defence through earnest self-counselling. The repeated self-injunction to 'never fear' and the implications of that sinister 'if he should touch me' reveal real anxiety, for she had, as this diary entry reveals, already been touched with fear.

If Lister's social status as country landowner could not protect her from the openly inimical attentions of working people, the hostility she encountered from her own class was much more covert. When she was cut socially by two ladies of her acquaintance in September 1823, she quickly ascribed this to their disapproval of her sexual nature: 'Miss Fountaine of Bath told them, in 1814, that I was masculine & said what they had never forgotten.' She puzzled as to whether they were offended by her sexuality, her presentation of it, or by her lifestyle: 'The very fault they find with me - is it in my self, my manner, or my situation in life?' (Whitbread, 1988: 294-5). Her account suggests that she suspected her sexual preferences were known, and disapproved of, by those outside her network of intimate friends:

Miss Morris & Miss Goodricke's conduct is so pointed they must have some especial reason for it. It cannot be merely my relative situation in life or my manners or my appearance. There must be something affecting character more than we know of. Explained [to Marianna] that their civility was of no importance to me but such a pointed way of appearing to shew that they did not think me fit society for them would be striking from any persons. Said I only cared on M[arianna]'s

account. Said more on the subject of acquiring more importance & then I could do with impunity what I could not do now (Whitbread, 1988: 298).

Although she dismisses her 'relative situation in life' as a likely cause of discrimination, she emphasizes the importance of progressing in society in order to provide protection for herself and her lovers, rather than the need to disguise her sexual nature. Indeed, Lister writes as though she is comfortable with her sexuality. In a diary entry of 13 November 1816, she recounts a speech she gave to Anne Belcombe, who '*asked if I thought the thing [homosexuality] wrong*'. Quoting the case of a man, who, though married with a child, had had homosexual relations, Lister avers that, although '*it was infamous to be connected with both sexes*', her own case was different:

*I urged in my own defence the strength of natural feeling & instinct for so might I call it as I had always had the same turn from infancy [?] as it had been made known to me as it were by intuition that I had never varied & no effort on my part had been able to counteract it that the girls liked me & had always liked me that I had never been refused by anyone & that without attempting to account for the thing I hoped it might under such circumstances be excused (SH: 7/ML/E).*

Her conviction that her sexual preferences were formed at an early age is one that is very common to homosexual men and women.<sup>21</sup> But although she echoed Rousseau in her declaration that, 'I am unlike anyone I have ever met. I dare to say I am like no one in the whole world' (Whitbread, 1988: 283), she also asserted that 'I had met with those who could feel in unison with me' (Whitbread, 1988: 297). The distinction she makes between natural lesbianism, 'the genuine thing' and sapphism also suggests that she was aware of a sophisticated discourse on female homosexuality (Whitbread, 1992: 49). In her

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Andrew Sullivan's introduction to his book about homosexuality, *Virtually Normal*, in which he writes of being aware of a 'secret' as a very young boy: 'I hardly dared mention it to anyone; and the complete absence of any note of the subject in my family or in school, in television, newspapers, or even books ... made the secret that much more mystifying' (Sullivan, 1995: 6).

reconstruction of a flirtatious conversation with Mrs Barlow Lister locates herself within that discourse and monitors her own part in it. The passage gives several clues to common assumptions about lesbian sexuality shared by women of the period:

Went to Mrs Barlow & sat with her an hour. Somehow she began talking of that one of the things of which Marie Antoinette was accused of was being too fond of women. I, with perfect mastery of countenance, said I had never heard of it before and could not understand or believe it. ... She said she should not have mentioned it but she knew she was not telling me anything I did not know before. I said I had read of women being too fond of each other in the Latin parts of the works of Sir William Jones. ... We agreed it was a scandal invented by men, who were bad enough for anything (Whitbread, 1992: 31-2).

The careful distinction Lister makes between 'natural' feelings and what she refers to as the artifice of 'Saffic regard' which 'was very different from mine & would be no pleasure to me' (Whitbread, 1992: 49) echoes the negative associations of sapphism during the late eighteenth century.<sup>22</sup> Hester Thrale (1776-1809), for example, refers several times to the dangers of 'sapphism' in her diary. In an entry of April 1789 she outlines the perils to society of the sexual inclinations of Marie Antoinette: 'The Queen of France is at the Head of a Set of Monsters call'd by each other *Sapphists* ... *That Vice* increases hourly in Extent - while expected *Parricides* fright us no longer' (quoted in Donoghue, 1993: 265). Here, Marie Antoinette's sapphism is associated not only with the decadent and exotic, but with the grotesque and unnatural, its influence more to be feared than parricide. Lister endorses Thrale's evaluation of sapphism when she describes it as 'artificial and inconsistent' and 'done from books' and compares it unfavourably with 'the effect of nature' (Whitbread,

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<sup>22</sup> Sappho was widely regarded as the founder of a lesbian tradition in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

1988: 273). Vicinus points out that Marie Antoinette was sometimes woven into pre-existing pornographic material (Vicinus, 1996: 241), providing a powerful and popular masculinist mythology about the dangers of sexual freedom. Yet, in the diary entry quoted above, the name of Marie Antoinette serves both as a catalyst for Lister's self-construction as disingenuous adventurer and as signifier of sexual interest between herself and Mrs Barlow. However, Lister, as a true admirer of Rousseau, rejects the 'artifice' of sapphism, and is a resolute biological determinist in her account of her lesbian sexuality. She writes 'Were I other than I am ...' (Whitbread, 1992: 19), and describes her 'conduct & feelings' as 'natural to me inasmuch as they were not taught, not fictitious, but instinctive' (Whitbread, 1988: 297).

There were no laws in Britain against women cross-dressing or having sexual relations with other women, as there were on the European continent, where marriage imitations between women were criminal and the penetration of one woman by another with an object was a serious offence. Lister may have been familiar with the trials in Holland in the 1790s of tribades (otherwise female hermaphrodites, or lesbians) for sodomy or 'dirty acts' (Donoghue, 1993: 75). In Britain, women who married women were charged under a motley collection of laws, including financial fraud and vagrancy (Donoghue, 1993: 73). Donoghue cites two cases reported in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in the 1770s: a young cross-dressing woman charged with financial fraud for marrying an older, richer woman, and a woman sentenced to the pillory and six months in jail for marrying three women under a fictitious name (Donoghue, 1992: 69). Fielding's pamphlet *The Female Husband* (1746) is a fictionalized account of the life of Mary Hamilton, who was arrested in 1746, and accused of posing as a physician and marrying Mary Price under false pretences. She was charged under the vagrancy act and sentenced to four public whippings and six months' hard labour. The pamphlet was reissued in 1813 as an anonymous chapbook and

may have been known to Lister. She demonstrates some anxiety about the possibility of transgressing legal as well as social laws when she expresses relief that Pickford 'seemed persuaded I never had any criminal connection with any of [her close women friends]' (Whitbread, 1988: 291). Although, as I have shown in Chapter 2, Lister held Enlightenment views about the expression of sexual feelings as 'natural' and 'instinctive' (Whitbread, 1988: 297), she would have been aware that this sexual tolerance did not extend to homosexuality. 'Decency and decorum' were the watchwords of the famous eighteenth-century sex therapist, James Graham: 'nothing will be said or seen, which can give even the smallest offence to the chastest and most delicate female ear and eye' (quoted in Porter, 1982: 19). The possibility of transgressing the bounds of propriety may, however, have added an extra frisson to the fantasy scenarios Lister constructed in her diary: 'Foolish fancying about Caroline Greenwood, meeting her on Skircoat Moor, taking her into a shed there is there & being connected with her. Supposing myself in men's clothes & having a penis, tho' nothing more. All this is very bad' (Whitbread, 1988: 151). This imaginary scene depicted potentially criminal activity in a dangerously public location, for even though Skircoat Moor was isolated and unpopulated, it was bounded by busy roads. Lister's erotic encounter might have been hidden within the shed, but there was still the exciting risk of discovery and exposure.

This is a theme that recurs in her fantasies. I have already quoted the diary entry in which she imagines herself with 'a penis & ... intriguing with [Mrs Milne] in the downstairs water-closet at Langton' (Whitbread, 1992: 153). This passage repeats many of the conditions of the earlier fantasy encounter. Langton was the family home of the Norcliffes. The 'downstairs water-closet', like the Skircoat shed, was an ostensibly private and enclosed space, but was situated within a bustling household, and therefore, also like the shed, was quasi-public, and outside Lister's control. There are other occasions when

she fantasizes about penile penetration, including this heartfelt wish during her courtship of Mrs Barlow, 'If I had a penis, tho' of but very small length, I should surely *break the ice* some of these times' (Whitbread, 1992: 42), a curiously modest aspiration, as though the length of the penis made any difference to the propriety of the fantasy.

Although, as I have shown, Lister had carefully researched the history and physiology of female homosexuality, there were few contemporary models upon which she could base her self-narrative of sexual identity. Miss Pickford and her companion, Miss Threlfall, were two local women whose attachment interested her for a while, but she was ultimately rather dismissive of them. Miss Pickford was 'too masculine', 'she runs after me too much', and her manners were 'singular' (Whitbread, 1988: 256). Lister vowed to 'treat her in her own way, that is, as I should treat a gentleman' (Whitbread, 1988: 270). As these observations are made during a period when Lister recounts that she had a new 'greatcoat' styled like a man's (Whitbread, 1988: 256), and found that 'ordering & work & exercise' excited her 'manly feelings' (Whitbread, 1988: 267), perhaps it was another case of 'two Jacks would not suit together', as with Tib Norcliffe (Whitbread, 1992: 127). The Ladies of Llangollen offered, in Lister's opinion, a more attractive example of a lasting female-female relationship: 'I am interested about these 2 ladies very much. There is something in their story & in all I have heard about them here that, added to other circumstances, makes a deep impression' (Whitbread, 1988: 201). She assessed their attachment shrewdly and decided that it was 'not platonic' but cemented by 'something more tender still than friendship' (Whitbread, 1988: 210).<sup>23</sup> She pronounced their home, Plas Newydd, which she visited in 1822, to be, 'the prettiest little spot I ever saw - a silken cord on which the

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<sup>23</sup> The Ladies countered suggestions that their relationship was sexual. In 1790, they sought legal advice about suing the *General Evening News* in which an article headed 'Extraordinary Female Affection' described Eleanor Butler as 'tall and masculine' and 'appearing in all respects as a young man', and Sarah Ponsonby as 'polite, effeminate, fair and beautiful' (Mavor, 1973: 74).



pearls of taste are strung. I could be happy here ...'. It was 'endeared ... to me by the association of ideas' (Whitbread, 1988: 209-10).<sup>24</sup>

With the scarcity of models for female homosexual relationships, it is perhaps not surprising that marriage offered a powerful metaphor for the kind of lasting sexual and emotional bond Lister desired with a woman. Her philandering with, among others, the Belcombe sisters, with her fellow Parisian pensionnée, Maria Barlow, and, at the Norcliffes house-party, with Mary Vallance, were also quests for the ideal life-partner. She describes her 'violent longing for a female companion', and in 1832, she seemed at last to have discovered a woman who fitted her exacting criteria (Liddington, 1994: 262).

Anne Walker was twenty-nine to Lister's forty-one, pleasant-looking, good-natured, though subject to nervous or depressive debility, unattached, and above all wealthy, with an independent estate larger than Lister's own, at Lidgate, in Lightcliffe, two miles from Shibden Hall. She was also, it seems, docile and biddable. Lister's revealing remark in her diary is '*Miss W & I got on very well ... If she was fond of me & manageable, I think I could be comfortable enough with her*' (Liddington, 1994: 41, my emphasis). As the courtship progressed, the conditions Lister attached to the match become clearer. On 28 September 1832, she wrote, 'Bordering on love-making in the hut ... Our liaison is now established.' Significantly, she added, '*I am reprovided [for] & the object of my choice have perhaps three thousand a year or near it - probably two-thirds at her own disposal*' (Liddington, 1994: 42). The arrangement she envisaged, was, like marriage, to combine a sexual connection with economic exchange.

Lister records that Anne Walker was not entirely happy with either requirement, nor with the idea as a whole: '*[she] got into the old story of [how] she felt she was not doing*

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<sup>24</sup> I discuss the influence of the landscape and architecture of Plas Newydd on Lister's designs for Shibden Hall and grounds in Rowanchild, 2000b.

*right morally, could not consent, had determined to say no' (Liddington, 1994: 43)* But she portrays herself as ruthlessly managing the situation, and 'laughing it all off' so successfully that Walker apologised and 'let me grubble [grope] her this morning gladly enough' (Liddington, 1994: 43-4). Later, when Lister pressed for a promise, suggesting that 'our present intercourse without any tie between us must be as wrong as any other transient connection' (Liddington, 1994: 44), Walker at last gave her a positive answer. The two women lived together as a couple until Lister's death, when Walker inherited the Shibden Hall estate. Her sister and Lister's distant relations had other ideas, however. They had Walker declared 'a lunatic' (Liddington, 1994: 11) and she was taken by force from Shibden Hall to the same asylum in York which had earlier housed Eliza Raine, where she remained until she died in 1854.

Lister had herself attached terms to Walker's inheritance. If Walker subsequently married her claim to the estate would 'thenceforth cease ... as if the said Anne Walker should have then departed this life' (Liddington, 1994: 10). According to Lister, Walker was equally concerned that their union should carry the same weight as a marriage:

*Miss W- told me in the hut if she said 'yes' again it should be binding. It should be the same as a marriage & she would give me no cause to be jealous. [She] made no objection to what I proposed, that is, her de[c]laring it on the Bible & taking the sa[c]rament with me at Shibden or Lightcliffe church (Liddington, 1994: 44).*

Liddington wonders if readers of Lister's diary, 'aware that Anne rejected heterosexuality, may find puzzling such references to church ritual and to lesbian marriage (including all the property implications that marriage then had)' (Liddington, 1994: 44). But Lister's attitude to marriage accords with her attempts to construct safe spaces in which to develop her sexuality, while staying within the bounds defined by her class and by convention. Marriage between women had well-known precedents, even though these

transgressed social mores and were sometimes punishable by law. Marriage, if she suspended her disbelief, could enclose Lister within a conformist tradition of which she approved and if this seemed like a case of wilful self-deception, for a woman-to-woman marriage might also damage her social standing and alienate her conservative female acquaintance, it reflected the complexity of the social and sexual tightrope she walked. Marriage with Anne Walker was quite consistent with Lister's practice of combining the sexual with the symbolic.

In her own geographical and social environment, Lister negotiated a place in which she could construct and develop her lesbian sexuality. Her marriage to Anne Walker was on terms derived from notions of romantic friendship, from an earlier tradition of the cross-dressing female husband, and from the heterosexual model. This was consistent with the diversity of influences on her attitudes to lesbian sexuality, which were shaped by many forces: by the changing values and processes through which models of female-female desire were defined; by the classical texts she plundered for validation; by contemporary para-medical sources on female sexuality; by her deeply held conventional beliefs concerning wealth, property, social status and hierarchies, and by the particular historical, geographical and social circumstances of her life and locale.

### **Lister and the presentation of lesbian sexuality**

In previous sections, I have shown that although Lister sometimes took a novelistic or romantic approach to questions of sexual desire, she also often adopted a swaggering authoritative tone in relation to the object of desire. This was matched by her careful self-presentation through dress, appearance and deportment. Lisa Moore remarks upon Lister's propensity to 'pillage ... male-authored texts in order to authorize her desires'. Just as she

adopts male attire in order to proposition women, she appropriates these texts and ‘transforms masculine accoutrements into something else altogether: the conditions of production of female homosexual character’, aligning herself with the ‘central cultural figure, genre and text’ in order to exceed the limitations imposed by the feminine. Hence, Moore argues, her admiration for Rousseau and her anxiety about ‘the dangerous femininity of fiction’ (Moore, 1996: 32-3).

Masculine clothing was obviously the practical choice for independent, active women, but, as I have indicated, there was a long oral and literary history of cross-dressing and its symbolic significance, in relation to both economic and sexual issues, was equally important for women cross-dressers. Vicinus claims that ‘the active mannish woman from the middle-classes can be found throughout Europe and America by the 1820s’, and that most of them asserted their right to enter ‘such predominantly male arenas as medicine, literature, art, and travel’ (Vicinus, 1996: 244). Literary representations of such women include Harriot Freke in Maria Edgeworth’s 1801 novel, *Belinda*, whose name indicates Edgeworth’s awareness of divisive discourses on homosexuality. Freke wears men’s boots and persuades her friend Lady Delacour to challenge another woman to a duel with pistols. She has a ‘stentorian voice’, a ‘horse laugh’ (Edgeworth, 1986: 39), and ‘bold masculine arms’ (Edgeworth, 1986: 48). In her autobiographical novel, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke* (1755), Charke at first cross-dresses to escape an errant husband, then continues in that fashion for many years, even marrying a young heiress.

Lister too found the mannish style suited the independent active life she led on Shibden Hall estate and the image she wished to project. At an early age, she adopted a style of dress that was considered eccentric or careless among her Halifax neighbours. A diary entry for November 1806, when she was fifteen, describes her attending ‘Mr Stafford’s concert in a Habit Skirt’, that is, the split riding skirt, the garment in which the Ladies of

Llangollen were frequently depicted. It was the closest a woman could get to trousers at that time, and was more usually worn on the farm or at a hunt meet. Lister writes that she 'was much stared at and well quizzed as an original' for this outfit. Her response to this attention was that 'care [was] despised on my part' (SH: 7/ML/E/26). In 1817, she describes herself sitting, 'before breakfast, in my drawers put on with gentleman's braces I bought for 2/6 on 27 March & my old black waistcoat & dressing-gown' (Whitbread, 1988:1). In that year also, she contemplated the idea that she would 'always wear black', a resolution she subsequently followed throughout her life (Whitbread, 1988: 9).<sup>25</sup> She appropriated masculine mannerisms, too, sleeping with a sword and loaded pistol by her side (Liddington, 1994: 27), and cultivating a 'deep-toned voice' (Whitbread, 1988: 118). By 1820, when she was twenty-nine, she reports being reprimanded by Marianna Belcombe for 'having too much of the civility of a well-bred gentleman' (Whitbread, 1988: 120). She recounts this with self-satisfaction, though she noted that her demeanour disturbed Belcombe: 'Speaking of my manners, she owned they were not masculine but such was my form, voice & style of conversation ... that if this sort of thing was not carried off by my talents & cleverness, I should be disgusting' (Whitbread, 1988: 116).

Her sartorial style was received variously by her lovers. Mrs Barlow, she reports, contemplating the suggestion that she remove her night-shift, said 'if I wore men's clothes she would feel differently' (Whitbread, 1992: 49), and, having joked that Lister 'had nothing to give, meaning I had no penis', said that 'If I only wore breeches it would be enough' (Whitbread, 1992: 81). Marianna Belcombe, as indicated above, was not so enthusiastic about it. Indeed, it was the cause of a serious rift in their relationship, which Lister relates at length. In August 1823, Lister set out on foot to meet the coach that was

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<sup>25</sup> Again, the Ladies are usually pictured in black, which had the added attraction of association with the Gothic hero and Lord Wellington himself.

bringing Belcombe from Lancashire to stay at Shibden Hall. It was a wet and windy day and Lister had walked ten miles and reached Blackstone Edge, a point high on the Pennines, before the carriage arrived. When she stepped out to meet it, her lover was apparently horrified at her appearance, 'the awkwardness of the cut & curl of my hair', and the state of her clothes. Belcombe called her a 'fright', and as Lister sadly related, she was greeted 'not with any female weakness of sympathy but with the stronger mien of shocked astonishment'. 'Why had I not come in the gig?' was all that mattered (Whitbread, 1988: 277-9). Belcombe later repented and wrote that she was only concerned that everyone should have a good opinion of Lister. Lister, however, reading between the lines, interpreted her words as '[I am]ashamed for you for the fear of everyone's disparagement' (Whitbread, 1988: 284-5). According to a diary entry for September 1823, Belcombe persisted with her complaints, declaring that 'people staring so ... made her feel quite low' and wishing Lister had a feminine figure'. 'She had just observed that I was getting mustaches & that when she first saw this it made her sick' (Whitbread, 1988: 296).

Lister rarely writes about her lovers' dress or appearance, though she sometimes remarks on the prettiness of a girl she has spotted. As Belcombe was so appalled by Lister's lack of decorum at Blackstone Edge, we may assume that she herself adopted a conventionally feminine style. Mrs Barlow is described as 'tolerably ladylike' but otherwise her femininity is taken for granted. Lister clearly was not attracted to women who were themselves masculine in their attitudes or looks. She commented of Miss Ann Paley that she 'seems a nice enough woman (girl) but lolls her arm over the chair back or sticks her elbow out with her hand akimbo in rather too masculine a manner, but this both her sisters ... do' (Whitbread, 1988: 100). Lister describes herself as usually initiating sexual contact, 'lifted her down and placed her on my knee' (Whitbread, 1992: 47),

resenting 'anything that reminded me of my petticoats' (Whitbread, 1992: 173), and being used to being 'stared at on account of my walk, etc.' (Whitbread, 1992: 54).

Her meeting with Miss Pickford gave her a chance to observe the self-presentation of the mannish cross-dressing woman from without. Interestingly, Lister initially adopts a superior and slightly pitying tone in which there seems little irony: 'I daresay knowing me is a godsend to Miss Pickford. She can be more companionable than anyone here, but she is too masculine & if she runs after me too much, I shall tire. Her manners are singular. Sometimes she seems a little swing-about' (Whitbread, 1988: 256). In a passage that seems to acknowledge a mirroring of her own aspect, Lister observes of Pickford: 'I never met with such a woman before. I looked at her & felt oddish, but yet did not dislike her. It was too dark to analyse each other's countenances & mine would have betrayed nothing.' She dissolves this uncomfortable thought by defining the terms on which they will engage: 'I will treat her in her own way, that is, as I should treat a gentleman & this will suit her. She rather looks down, I think, on women in general. This is a foible I can manage well enough' (Whitbread, 1988: 270).

There is no reason to suppose that Lister, for all her mannish characteristics, wished to be a man, and apart from the occasional hypothetical comment, always made in the context of a seduction, as, for example to Mrs Barlow, 'Should have been in love with her if I had been a man' (Whitbread, 1992: 39), she makes no allusion to such a desire. She appears to have been unhappy, however, with some aspects of her female physiognomy. She carefully disguised her menstruation, which she called her 'cousin', from her lovers, even from her eventual life-companion, Anne Walker: '*No kiss. Had slept in cousin-linen with paper as usual, & white worsted stockings besides, which kept all very comfortable; A- never found out that I had cousin*' (Liddington, 1998: 149). When she considered Mrs Barlow's suitability as a companion, she noted that 'she lets me see too much that she

considers me too much as a woman. She talks to me about being unwell. I have aired napkins before her. She feels me, etc. All which I like not. Marianna never seems to know or notice these things' (Whitbread, 1992: 88).

Lister makes it clear in her diary that her self-presentation arose in conscious imitation of a man, rather than from desire to be a man. When she twirled her watch about to impress Mrs Priestly, she did so in a 'rather gentlemanly sort of style' rather than *as* a gentleman (Whitbread, 1988: 330); when Miss Browne requested that she take the leather strap off the handle of her umbrella, she did so because it 'made it look like a gentleman's' (Whitbread, 1988: 80, my emphasis). The greatcoat she ordered from a gentleman's outfitters in London was for 'a lady's measure' and 'sufficiently wide in the sleeves to be easy over my pelisse' (Whitbread, 1988: 285-6). Indeed, it seemed to take very little effort to give the impression of masculinity: an umbrella with a strap, a black riding-habit, a greatcoat, and a deep voice. In many respects, Lister observed the conventions of feminine appearance and attire: she curled her hair (Whitbread, 1988: 263); she wore a pelisse, 'slips' (SH: 7/ML/E, 14 November 1816), stays, and carried 'nice cambric pocket handers [handkerchiefs]' (SH: 7/ML/A/37). Even the manly Miss Pickford's attire was 'an old-fashioned, short-waisted, fright of a brown habit with yellow metal buttons', which was scarcely customary wear for a man (Whitbread, 1988: 239). Yet, so little symbolised so much, that when Anne Belcombe saw Lister tidying up some old clothes of her dead brother, Sam, 'an old black coat breeches etc.', she assumed that they were Lister's, and that she wore them when visiting her fictitious lover, Sarah Binns (SH: 7/ML/&, 27 November 1816).

Lister's self-presentation seems to have been a vital part of her self-construction. She continually examines that presentation, and its success or failure, in her diary writings. Her meetings with Miss Pickford, analysed and reported with such vigour, though fraught with



the double-binds of wilful self-deception ('I am now let into her secret & she forever barred from mine'), provided her with an image of herself and a presentation to set beside her own, and encouraged her to shift her position just a little from the construction of herself as exotic and idiosyncratic: 'Are there more Miss Pickfords in the world than I have ever before thought?' (Whitbread, 1988: 273).

### Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter indicates that Lister conceived of her sexuality, not simply in terms of sexual relations, but as a sexual sensibility, acknowledging it as an integral part of her self: 'Je sens mon coeur'. Her strong sense of homosexuality as an identity and practice with a historical past was gained from her classical studies, and although the lack of detail regarding lesbians in these sources might have troubled her, contemporary texts, erotica, pamphlets, articles and novels, filled the gaps. Perhaps more importantly, Lister's diary and letters point to the existence of a community of women who loved women in the Halifax and York areas, into which Lister was quickly accommodated. Her adoption of manly attire, behaviour and accoutrements was not, as the case of Miss Pickford indicates, entirely singular in her locality. It was consistent with a tradition of cross-dressing women and represented her intention to conduct herself as an independent authoritative being,<sup>26</sup> identifying her as a lesbian to other interested women and the world in general, and more particularly to herself.

Lister's writings demonstrate the range and subtlety of her relationship to her sexuality. She portrays herself as remarkably candid in her relations to her social circle and her

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<sup>26</sup> George Sand, for example, adopted a customary outfit of trousers, boots, top hat and riding jacket, in 1831, as cheaper and more functional attire that enabled her to participate in masculine activities like riding astride, or taking a place in the theatre stalls, from which women were excluded (Dickenson, 1989: 80-81).

appearance a matter, not of lonely pride, but (except on the occasion of Marianna Belcombe's criticism) of positive superiority. In her self-narrative she is never without a lover and rarely has to go looking for one. Although some of the more diffident members of her extensive network may have been 'underground', as Ballaster suggests, there were others, like Miss Pickford, or Tib Norcliffe, whose obvious declaration of their sexuality sometimes embarrassed her. The language with which Lister expresses her sexual experience is frank and unambiguous, employing a vital and descriptive idiom. On other occasions she delves into her emotions, using the affective language of romantic friendship. In her early letters, the use of double-entendre suggests a sophisticated response to combining convention with a covert declaration of sexual intent. Her writings show her managing her sexual persona in a social setting, and eliciting a sympathetic if startled response, as if her very 'oddity' were perhaps a source of authority. She describes Halifax grande dame, Mrs Priestley, as saying that 'she always told people I was natural, but she thought nature was in an odd freak when she made me ... (Liddington, 1998: 18).

It may be argued that the opposition Lister faced was no more than any eccentricity or failure to conform might have provoked. But it is useful to remember that Lister's first and last lovers, Eliza Raine and Anne Walker, were both committed to the same insane asylum in York for reasons not unconnected with their sexuality. The willingness of all those involved in the committals to accept the diagnosis of madness in these two women is perhaps all the more remarkable if it is considered that most of them were Lister's acquaintances or friends. These same people could have turned against Lister, whose social position was no more elevated. But they did not. Perhaps the bold presentation of her sexuality helped construct a public persona whose display of authority was sufficiently successful to make people forget it was an imitation, or perhaps they accepted her as a token, or 'an original' as Lister called herself. Lister's lapses in loyalty to her network of

lesbian friends and acquaintances may have fostered this attitude, for, in Raine's case, one of those implicated in her committal was Lister herself. But her success in negotiating possible social pitfalls may be principally attributable to her continuing written account of her feelings and experiences. Here, her appearance, deportment, conduct and innermost thoughts are recounted, examined and situated within a chronological narrative and within a literary tradition of erotic and identity writings, while her self-construction as sexual and textual subject enabled her to explore and develop her individuated, relational and sexual selves. And Lister's characteristic response to any awkwardness or challenge to her sexuality was not to adopt disguise or subterfuge,<sup>27</sup> but to take even tighter control of her textual production.

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<sup>27</sup> The case of Mary Diana Dodds is interesting in respect of the subterfuge some early nineteenth-century women adopted to hide their sexuality. Dodds was born around 1791, the same year as Lister. As a young woman she was described as looking like 'some one of the masculine gender' who had 'indulged in the masquerade freak of feminine habiliments' (quoted in Bennett, 1991: 93-4). Miss Dodds suddenly went missing and reappeared in the guise of Mr Sholto Douglas, who married Isabella Robinson in September 1827. The couple removed immediately to France on false passports procured with the help of Mary Shelley. Their true relationship was concealed from wider society who regarded 'Mr. And Mrs. Douglas, friends of Mary Shelley' as an ideal heterosexual couple, 'he is very clever, agreeable and amiable, and she beautiful' (quoted in Bennett, 1991: 126).



## Chapter 5: The ‘acquiring of more importance’: The Relational Author and the Social Self

In her introduction to *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (1998), Amanda Vickery characterizes women of the minor gentry of this period as ‘considering themselves profoundly conventional’. She suggests that ‘it is hard to imagine them smiling on the likes of ... a mannish lesbian such as Anne Lister’, but concedes that ‘the bounds of propriety were wider than historians have been apt to admit’ (Vickery, 1998: 11-12). Lister herself believed her ‘masculine’ appearance, and by implication, her sexual identity, sometimes inhibited her social advancement (Whitbread, 1988: 294-5), but, rather than modifying her appearance and concealing her sexuality, she favoured ‘acquiring more importance & then I could do with impunity what I could not do now’ (Whitbread, 1988: 298). Her status and fortune did indeed advance from 1816, when, as an impecunious niece, she took over the management of Shibden from James Lister. By the time of her death she was a friend of the European aristocracy, and mistress of a modernized estate, with redesigned hall and landscaped grounds. The rapidity with which she effected these changes certainly suggests the urgency of her desire to act ‘with impunity’. But is Vickery right when she supposes that women of the minor gentry would not smile on ‘mannish lesbian’ Lister?

In this chapter I examine Lister's social networks and explore the part her diary and letter-writing played in establishing and maintaining them. How far were the values of the unsmiling gentry shared by Lister? How flexible were the bounds of propriety when it came to the mistress of Shibden Hall? I propose that Lister's diary and letters were vital in her attempt to 'acquire more importance' and in negotiating those problematic areas between her class and sexual identity, between social propriety and transgression. Her diary-writing, I argue, was not just a private, intimate pursuit focused on self-reporting and self-narrating, but was important in constructing a relational and a social self. I also investigate Lister's self-constructive activities around the renovation of Shibden Hall and grounds, and argue that her self-narrative was expressed in landscape and architecture, as well as in written text. These encompassed both social and relational aspects of self - her building schemes were closely tied to her social ambitions - and the development of her individuated self and her sexual self-representation.

Vickery's study focuses on a Lancashire woman of the minor gentry, Elizabeth Shackleton (1726-81), whose diary-writings she describes as 'unparalleled in their range and detail' but 'far from extraordinary in their content: elements of her experience and value system can be found across scores of other women's manuscripts' (Vickery, 1998: 11). The coherence and consistency Vickery has discovered among 'the concerns that privileged women were prepared to commit to paper' indicates the significance of diary-writing in the construction of the relational self and the maintenance of the networks of polite society (Vickery, 1998: 11).<sup>1</sup> Women's diary-writing at this time was not always a private confessional. Its purpose was often social, that is, the delineation of class

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<sup>1</sup> Vickery uses the terms 'polite' and 'genteel' to describe the group of provincial women who 'hailed from families headed by lesser landed gentlemen, attorneys, doctors, clerics, merchants and manufacturers' (Vickery, 1998: 13). She notes that the 'social cohesion' of this group, though 'not necessarily the universal experience ... was nevertheless widespread in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries' (Vickery, 1998: 35).

boundaries and conventions and the accommodation of its producer to them. In this respect, Lister's diary production may well parallel Shackleton's in its range and detail, its daily reporting, defining or even inventing of social nuances. However, Vickery's assertion that 'two topics that were virtually never canvassed ... were spirituality and sex' (Vickery 1998: 11) demonstrates how far Lister had stretched the eighteenth-century woman diarist's bounds of propriety and how far she was prepared to perceive herself as unconventional or transgressing those bounds. I shall argue that even in her writings about sex, and her explorations of sexual identity and sexual relationships, Lister was concerned not only with producing a sense of an individuated self, but a self in relation to society.

The function of women's private diaries has often been ascribed to women's need to assert the self in the face of oppressive patriarchal culture. Domna C. Stanton argues that 'the graphing of the autobiography' has been 'an act of self-assertion that denied and reversed woman's status' (quoted in Blodgett, 1989: 89), and Liz Stanley writes that

while recognizing the influences on them, it is crucial to treat biographical subjects as agents of their lives and not as puppets whose thoughts and actions were determined, whether by social structures, or by ideological prescriptions of how women and men were supposed to be, or indeed by others within their social and political circles (Stanley, 1992: 219).

Blodgett notes 'the essential conservatism of most of the diarists, who for better or worse, accept the patriarchal system of power and values, [which] is evident from the earliest diarists on' (Blodgett, 1989: 103), and suggests that most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women 'accepted subordination of their being to men's' (Blodgett, 1989: 108). However, she also proposes that 'a credible reason' for the attraction of the diary to women is 'a reaction to leading restricted or subordinated lives that make some ... self-assertive act necessary or ... appealing (Blodgett, 1989: 87). Simons, too, draws attention to

'the fraught search for self-discovery ... that was so eloquently conveyed through [women's] most reliable resource, the personal journal' (Simons, 1990: 14). I have argued myself in earlier chapters that Lister's diary encompasses what Simons identifies as the search for 'a unified self' in the face of 'the division between public and private aspects of self' (Simons, 1990: 15), and a desire to develop and establish her unconventional sexual identity and reconcile it with her masculinist self-narrative as a significant member of genteel local (if not national) society. It is this latter aspect of diary-writing, the writer's employment of her diary as a means of accommodation and negotiation in society, that has hitherto been underplayed, perhaps understandably in the light of a perceived need to reinscribe the value of women's personal writings within the literary canon. Vickery's observation that Elizabeth Shackleton's diaries 'grew out of the daily record-keeping of genteel housewifery' (Vickery, 1998: 75) is, then, a useful reminder of the variety of functions served by diary-writing. Such housewifely concerns were directed practically towards the organisation, ordering and maintenance of domestic life and social networks, whether by recording recipes, expenses and illnesses, like Diana Astray (1671-1716) who 'enumerates all the interesting meals she has encountered' (Blodgett, 1989: 67), or gossip, meetings, and habitual experiences, like Elizabeth Percy (1716-1776), whose avowed aim was to 'scatter here & there forms, customs, rules &c of the Court to shew their variations at different periods & likewise the manners of the Times' (quoted in Blodgett, 1989: 31).

Even the most practical and domestic record-keeping involves self-management which enables the writer to function within the family and society. In Lister's case, it also helped her maintain control over the reception of her self-presentation. Her meticulous record in her diary of visits, conversations, debts, both emotional and financial, and snippets of gossip, letters and social timetables, was an important means of self-protection, and of social negotiation. She recounts writing up her diary from notes made 'on a slate', for



example (Whitbread, 1988: 52) or in Eliza Raine's old 'little red morocco pocket case with asses' skin leaves', in which she 'rubbed out all the writing & used ... in common for memoranda & notes made on the spot' (Whitbread, 1988: 218). She even, as I have noted, kept a monthly index of the events she had recorded, which, among other functions, gave her rapid access to the diary contents and their relevant dates. The memorandum, dated 14 September 1816, at the top of the index for August 1816, shows how carefully she preserved her notes: 'wrote out this part of my journal from notes after my return from Lawton' (SH: 7/ML/E/26/2). In revising and reviewing her papers at regular intervals, she echoed one of the most common justifications for women's diary-writing, self-improvement.<sup>2</sup> Her diary, however, seems oddly devoid of the moralizing self-deprecation often associated with women's diaries, but is concerned much more with personal, social and educational advancement through self-control.<sup>3</sup> A diary entry for 16 October 1817 recounts how 'In the evening, [she] looked over an old portfolio of papers, extracts, letters, copies of letters etc. Began directly after tea & did not leave off till 1/2 past 10 ... No time for flute' (Whitbread, 1988: 16). With each of these reviews Lister consolidated her archive, and reacquainted herself with her observations on her position in relation to local society and its individual members, exhorting herself to progress further in society in order to achieve her personal and social ambitions.

Jill Liddington has called Lister 'her own archivist' (Liddington, 1994: 57), a term which aptly describes the meticulous assembling, recording and editing of papers that Lister carried out over her lifetime, and her methodical organization of both her own

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Eastlake (1809-93), for example, began her journal hoping that 'it may become, the occasion for good, for self-examination, and for self-correction' (quoted in Blodgett, 1989: 77).

<sup>3</sup> Blodgett suggests that self-improvement is a pre-occupation of many women's diaries from the earliest times to the present-day (Blodgett, 1989: 76-78). Sally Shuttleworth, in her study of Charlotte Brontë, points out the increasing importance of ideas of self-control, 'that sacrosanct principle of Victorian culture', as the nineteenth century advanced. 'The question of whether the individual is a self-determined agent, or merely a part of a larger machine, hinges on the crucial issue of self-control' (Shuttleworth, 1996: 23).

literary production and that of friends and acquaintances. Here I investigate how her use of taxonomic practices (for example, extensive collection and documentation of data concerning immediate *and* distant members of her circle), together with the economic and political power vested in her as a rural landowner, helped her to progress socially and to negotiate the slippage between her public and private, central and marginal selves. Lister's diary and letters not only allowed her to explore her innermost feelings; they provided a site for social negotiations.

### **Blood and rank**

Lister's relentless programme of autodidactic study, social engagements, flirtations and letter-writing would have produced a heavy daily schedule, but the overseeing of estate business, with all its legal, financial and practical considerations greatly increased her responsibilities. By Lister's day, inherited land was no longer the single factor determining wealth and class. Even the large aristocratic estates were beginning to exploit the commercial possibilities of their land's natural resources. Lister herself supplemented Shibden's limited agricultural income from its rich seams of coal, needed to power the manufacturing industry, and from its quarries, which supplied the stone for roads and canals, and she held shares in canals and turnpike trusts. John Smail, in his study of the rising middle class of Halifax in the eighteenth century, argues that 'the evidence from Halifax amply confirms that the boundary between the commercial and professional elites and landed society was not very clear' (Smail, 1994:200), and Lister's own conduct indicates a fluidity in social contact between trade, professional and gentry families. Her diary-writings, however, constantly indicate a desire to separate herself from a demeaning association with trade and be counted unambiguously among the landed gentry, whose

major revenues had once been derived from agricultural rents. When, in 1835, she discovered the 'old trade books and copies of trade letters' of her Uncle Joseph, the last of the Lister family to participate in the cloth trade, her embarrassment was so great that she 'did not examine them but burnt them all' (Liddington, 1998: 7). The Lister family, though old, originated with the prosperous Pennine merchants of the sixteenth century, but she began to construct a different, selective version of events, stretching and amplifying the Lister link with Shibden Hall, which, in 1834, she described as 'my own place where my family had lived between 2 & 3 centuries, I being the 15th possessor of my family and name' (Liddington, 1998: 3). She records with satisfaction a conversation with her solicitor in 1835, in which '[he] said my own family was the only old one here ... [I] took the palm of antiquity offered, tho' spoke with conciliatory consideration to all those newer settlers whose property and respectability gave them claims on the town' (Liddington, 1998:152).

With Shibden Hall as a focus for her social ambitions and self-narrative, it is not surprising that Lister portrays her Aunt Anne and Uncle James as more desirable family connections than her own parents, who, in 1806, had moved from Market Weighton to a smaller house on the outskirts of Halifax. Lister's room there, according to her brother Samuel, was no better than a 'kennel' (Liddington, 1998: 10). Her father's vulgarity and lack of gentlemanliness is a constant refrain of her diary. A journey she made with him in September 1822, for example, wrought her to a pitch of despair: 'My father is so desperately vulgar. He speaks loud of what he used to see & do long since ... Points at everything & spits every now & then.... Heaven grant this to be my last journey with my father. I am shocked to death at his vulgarity of speech & manner ... I am perpetually in dread of meeting anyone I know' (Whitbread, 1988: 218-9). His failure to increase his family's wealth or social standing and to control his wife's heavy drinking was a source of shame to Lister. Although, as I have outlined in Chapter 2, Lister's childhood letters

indicate a warm relationship with her mother, but this seems to have soured quickly after her removal to Shibden. Her mother's drunkenness was significant enough to be monitored in her diary and included in terse encoded entries in the index: '*Fri. 27 [Dec. 1816] my mother tipsy 25 nights*' (SH: 7/ML/E/26/3).

Her brother Samuel, however, commanded her hopes and respect until his early death. In 1813, she pleaded with him, as 'the last remaining hope and stay of an old, but lately drooping family', to 'seize it in its fall. Renovate its languid energies; rear it with a tender hand, and let it once more bloom upon the spray. Ah! let the well-ascended blood that trickles in your veins ... prove it is not degenerated from the spirit of yr ancestors' (Green, 1992: 38).<sup>4</sup> Her letter links the language of cultivation to the genetic inheritance of the country gentry, implying that her 'ancestors' have been caretakers of the land, that the blood-line has remained pure, 'well-ascended', and that the procedures they have used in tending crops and breeding stock may be employed to revive the fortunes of the present family. There are conflicting images here, however. Lister shows her vulnerability to accusations of degeneracy in her exhortation to Sam to prove otherwise. Nevertheless, the terms she chooses, 'drooping', 'fall' and 'languid energies', are all suggestive of degeneration of the stock, and it is telling that she appeals to Sam's loyalty to 'the *spirit*' of his ancestors rather than to the corporeal family.

These terms may be derived from her attachment to georgic ideas of land cultivation as both symbolizing and actualizing the ideals of family and nation. I have shown in Chapter 3 how Lister prepared herself for residence at Shibden by reading text books on farming and agriculture. One of the books that she particularly enjoyed was Hunter's *Georgical Essays* (1803), a treatise on land husbandry (Green, 1992: 29). Jill Casid, in her essay, 'Queer(y)ing Georgic', argues that 'Georgic in its conventional forms ... justifies and

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<sup>4</sup> Samuel Lister died before the letter reached him.

glorifies patriarchally-organized and controlled agricultural production and heterosexual reproduction as the necessary bases for family and for national stability, peace and prosperity' (Casid, 1997: 305-6). If there appears to be a paradox in the idea of an unmarried lesbian woman who intends to remain childless embracing notions that support male dominance within the heterosexual family, Lister does not seem to have registered the contradictions. Her outward political convictions were resolutely conservative,<sup>5</sup> and more importantly, she constructed herself in her self-narrative, by right of inheritance and out of natural superiority, in a masculine role. Indeed, her sexual unconventionality may itself have supported her social ambitions and self-narrative as guardian of an ancient line, providing a rationale for her independent unmarried state and her appropriation of both the property and blood of the Lister inheritance. The irony that she would not perpetuate what she construed as an ancient blood-line did not disturb her. She feared any dilution of the Lister blood-line and the loss of family name and dispersal of the estate that would result from marriage into the exclusively female household, opposing all attempts by her sister Marian to marry. When, during a dispute about who should inherit the Shibden property after Lister's death, Marian threatened that she '*would marry and hoped to have a child and that would settle all*', Lister '*begged she would not marry for that*' (Liddington, 1998: 60). And when it finally looked as though Marian *would* marry, Lister wrote, '*Well, be it so - I only hope she will not marry as if from Shibden, and that I shall be away*' (Liddington, 1998: 127).<sup>6</sup> It was better for the genetic and property inheritance to end with Lister, still (according to her own construction) pure, than for it to degenerate through mixing the blood-line.

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<sup>5</sup> Although she was prepared to consider the ideas of female enfranchisement and ladies' membership of the Halifax Philosophical and Literary Society in her encoded diary. See Chapter 3.

<sup>6</sup> Marian Lister died unmarried in 1882, aged 84.

The persistence of georgic attitudes to blood and, indeed, to national identity, emerge strongly in her record of a stay in Paris from 1824 to 1825. This long period away from Shibden, out of a milieu in which she was generally known, allowed her to rehearse her narrative of ancient lineage to an apparently credulous and sycophantic company of women at her pension. A diary entry for October 1824 tells how she reworked her family history to a reportedly admiring and amorous audience, furthered her multiple sexual ambitions and produced a pleasing if fantastic account in which she constructed herself as an English gentleman:

Told [Mrs Barlow, a fellow-guest] I rattled away to Mme de Boyve [the landlady]. Admired her. Should have been in love with her if I had been a man, but would not have married her. Would only have married an Englishwoman. Would not mix the blood ... I was proud of my country. Loved the little spot where my ancestors had lived for centuries. Should inherit from them with pure English blood for five or six centuries and my children should not say I had mixed it. I loved my king & country & my compatriots & would not take my fortune away from them. I should be head of my family & it should remain English still. She [Mme de Boyve] admired the nobleness of my sentiments & said England was the first country in the world & when I said I should never marry at all, said she was glad of it for then I should never change to my friends, adding (but I did not tell Mrs Barlow this) she was not worthy of my friendship (Whitbread, 1992: 39-40).

This passage is an example of how Lister represents herself as opportunistically using her love interests to support her developing self-construction of social identity, and, vice versa, employing that construction to reinforce her amorous intentions. The narrative she produces is one in which she is dominant in both class, sexual attraction and social adeptness. In addition, in this passage she emphasizes the attribute of Englishness, which is

constructed as sexy, pure, dominant and desirable. Mme de Boyve is portrayed as the subservient foreigner acknowledging Lister's natural superiority as an English milady, or, indeed, milord, for the character she outlines for herself is a reprise of those masculine guises she favoured: the descendant of a fine antique heritage restoring the family fortunes; the courtly lover, or the fascinating but brutal aristocratic roué. Her ancestors are now stretched to 'five or six centuries' occupation of Shibden, which is coyly referred to as 'the little spot'. Her emphasis upon 'blood' and the importance of maintaining its purity, as well as the dangers of dispersing the family fortune, is at first offered as a reason for not marrying outside England, but shortly afterwards she declares that she 'should never marry at all', an announcement redolent with significant meaning for Lister, for it encompassed both her sexual inclinations (the impossibility of marrying a man), and her defence of Lister blood.

### **Redrawing Shibden**

Lister regarded Shibden Hall through the lens of her developing narrative of ancient heritage and found that it did not conform in every respect to the standards she required. She had an ambivalent attitude towards the old building, loving its antiquity but despairing of its unfashionable pokiness. It was built by a sheep farmer of Southowram at the turn of the fifteenth century. The wings and passages that were later added to the original half-timbered single room distinguished it from the more vernacular 'Halifax' house of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, built entirely from stone by the new wealth of the merchant clothiers, in which many of Lister's landowning or better-off neighbours lived (Porter, 1980:72).<sup>7</sup> She already had a clear idea of the changes she wanted when in 1836

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 5, figure 2, for a depiction of Shibden Hall before Anne Lister had it 'improved'.

she hired the architect John Harper, recommended to her as ‘a rising man’ (Brears, 1978: 57). He produced, under her guidance, plans that would restore the half-timbering, replace stone sashes with new timber bay windows, and reopen the original main hall to the rafters, combining a ‘Jacobethan’ style with medieval revival. A three-storey Gothic tower would provide a library and modern water closets. Castellated towers were reluctantly rejected as too expensive.<sup>8</sup> The resulting building would combine an air of ancient grandeur and old family money, with modern conveniences, and a fashionable appearance (albeit one going *out* of fashion). While the alterations were costly, undoubtedly impressive, and alluded to contemporary fashion, they also emphasized the modesty, seclusion, pastoral and traditional qualities of the Pennine dwelling.

The significance of Lister’s designs for the house and grounds at Shibden was not, however, confined to the embodiment of georgic ideals, for it encompassed wider aspects of her self-narrative. Before she instructed her architect, Lister considered possible models. She admired St. Mary’s church at Kenilworth, which she described as a ‘*nice little model for Shibden*’, and she was interested in the home of Bess of Hardwick, at Hardwick Hall (Brears, 1978: 56). But an example of female architectural design that satisfied many of her requirements was the home of the Ladies of Llangollen. Very few women had the opportunity to commission their own designs and decorations. The Ladies were notable exceptions, whose cottage, Plas Newydd, became a place of pilgrimage for the genteel tourist.<sup>9</sup> Lister visited their cottage in 1822, and was very pleased by what she found: ‘the place ... shews excellent taste - much to the credit of the ladies who have done it entirely’ (Whitbread, 1988: 196).

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 5, figure 3, for John Harper’s proposed improvements to the South front of Shibden Hall.

<sup>9</sup> Marianna Belcombe visited the Ladies’ house with her sister, Louisa, in 1817 and waxed lyrical in a letter to Lister, ‘the place “is a beautiful little bijou”’ (Whitbread, 1988: 196). A few days before Lister’s own visit, her friend, Henrietta Crompton, produced an elegant sketch of the cottage in the picturesque manner, inscribed ‘... the beautiful cottage of Lady Eleanor Butler & Miss Ponsonby ... We drank tea with these most delightful individuals & left them with much regret’ (CR/MIC2709/130).



Mavor suggests that the Ladies originally conceived of their house and land as a *ferme ornée*, or ornamented farm, in imitation of the farmhouse of the poet, William Shenstone (1714-63) (Mavor, 1973: xvii). The *ferme ornée* would have had particularly interesting resonances for Lister as Marie Antoinette's *hameau* at Versailles, a rustic-style hamlet and farm intended to provide a combination of agricultural production and visual pleasure, was popularly associated with sapphic or tribadic practices, rumoured to be practised by the French Queen and her ladies-in-waiting.<sup>10</sup> Lister's designs for Shibden embodied many features of the *ferme ornée*: the rustic thatched hut, the wilderness, the 'natural' lake, and the passage beneath the terrace where the gardeners could pass without disturbing the scene. Casid suggests that such a landscape balanced at the precarious boundary 'between improved nature which could be identified as "natural" and improved nature as spoiling artifice or excessive cultivation', had the ability to subvert georgic discourse (Casid, 1997: 310). Lister's redesigned Shibden Hall, then, provided a remarkable combination of styles and meanings; like the diary, it reconstructed and reinforced Lister's self-narrative as descendent of an ancient line and leader of fashion, while encompassing those aspects of her self that were provincial, retiring, and lesbian.<sup>11</sup>

### **Ambitions and advancement**

Lister's management of her public reception and archive of topical data begins with the beginning of the diary itself. An entry of November 1808 records a conversation between two acquaintances who had seen her at a party:

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<sup>10</sup> Lister was aware of Marie Antoinette's reputation. See her conversation with Mrs Barlow quoted in Chapter 4.

<sup>11</sup> For more details of Lister's self-constructive activities in building and architecture see my essay, Rowanchild, 2000b.

[Mrs B-] was pleased with me - she said ... 'I saw Miss Lister on Sunday'. 'Did you Ma'am?' Mrs B- 'What a pity that she does not pay more attention to her appearance, for those who do not know her judge from this, but you who see so much of her think nothing of it and indeed I do not wonder, for she is such a pleasant companion that I myself could have listened to her till I forgot it (Liddington, 1994: 26-7).

The reproduction of speech idiosyncrasies in this passage indicates that Lister was already interested in novelistic techniques. Her eccentric appearance and social skills are observed with apparent narrative detachment even as they reinforce her self-construction as a fascinating *roué*. As her social engagements grew grander and more public, so Lister's interest in her reception, and its management, developed. Her first official season out in society was in 1809 when she was eighteen. She was 'introduced at the Rooms' in York.<sup>12</sup> Her brother John remarked on her return that 'I'm afraid they have spoilt you' (Liddington, 1998: 15), not adding how, or for what. Lister already had an *entrée* into fashionable York society through friends from Manor School and the Belcombe family. She began now to visit one of the grandest houses in town, Micklegate House, where Henrietta Crompton and her family lived. Despite their wealth, she adjudged the Cromptons 'not very genteel - not elegant enough for me' and 'all rather vulgarish' (Whitbread, 1988: 248), but they apparently did not recognize her superiority. Lister considers this in a piece of remarkable double-speak, in which their neglect of her is constructed as a tribute to her personality: 'Is it talent or what that gives me a general sort of ascendancy, in spite of opposing

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<sup>12</sup> The *season* was the period of the year during which the parents of young unmarried women brought them *out* as available for marriage, and paraded them at balls, and other social gatherings, before the eyes of possible suitors. The York season was the best strategy for obtaining a good marriage for young women whose families could not afford London or Bath, and was specifically designed to provide a northern rival to its southern counterparts. Lord Burlington had decided in 1730 to 'make it ye most compleat place of entertainment in England' (quoted in Vickery, 1998: 261), and his new assembly rooms, opened in 1732, were thought to be superior to those of Bath.

circumstances? For I find ... the Cromptons ... rather to wait for my paying them attention than vice versa' (Whitbread, 1988: 248). Her uncertainty about her social relations with them surfaced when, after a visit to York in 1823 in which she had openly flirted with Henrietta, she was met at Halifax by her father with a cart: "What a shockingly vulgar concern," said I to myself. My heart almost sickened. How, thought I, can I think of the Cromptons? Am I not foolish to have begun an intimacy with people so near me, within twelve miles?'<sup>13</sup> Their values and attitudes were apparently noticeably influential for Lister records Miss Marsh telling her that 'My Micklegate friends [the Cromptons] spoilt me - puffed me up with vanity' (Whitbread, 1988: 253), echoing her brother's assessment of the effect of York company, and suggesting that it was 'vanity' that had 'spoilt' her enjoyment of less elevated company.

During the early days as a guest of her Uncle James at Shibden Hall, Lister was aware that she needed to 'acquire more importance' if she was to be allowed to negotiate social rules, but she had not yet constructed the more confident narrative of ancient lineage that emerged later. At her newly adopted home in Halifax, her circle was made up of neighbours she had known most of her life, but who, by York standards, were country bumpkins. The Greenwoods, for example, were a local family whose daughters had long been the object of Lister's flirtations and fantasies.<sup>14</sup> Her early diary is full of references to tea and card parties at their house, Cross-hills, to outings and musical evenings shared. At one time, she wrote that 'tho' uneasy at [their] vulgarity ... Yet they are certainly very good & worthy & very obliging' (Whitbread, 1988: 41). A little later they were 'as vulgar as ever' and she was 'thoroughly ashamed' of their company and vowed she 'should not drink tea at the Greenwoods again in a hurry ... I can less than ever get over the vulgarity of the

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<sup>13</sup> The Cromptons had a country house, Esholt, about twelve miles from Halifax.

<sup>14</sup> Lister had imagined herself with a penis making love to Caroline Greenwood in a shed on Skircoat Moor, an incident described in Chapter 4.

whole set of them' (Whitbread, 1988: 77). The contrast between her York circle and her Halifax acquaintance manifested itself painfully when one of the Greenwoods appeared at a York ball. The Cromptons 'quizzed me about having such countrywomen. Surely one had never seen such objects in a ballroom. They were the amusement of the whole room' (Whitbread, 1988: 246).

Lister's sophisticated friends in York may have found her Halifax acquaintance quaintly provincial, but Lister herself also had an ambivalent attitude to them. First, they were friends of her uncles, James and Joseph, with whom she wished to be on good terms. Second, many of them had been known to her since her childhood visits to Shibden Hall and Halifax, and she was fond of them and they of her. Third, and perhaps most important, they had considerable social and economic power in the district. If Anne Lister had, as it appears she did from an early age, 'the expectation of succeeding my uncle', then she needed them as allies, commercially and socially (Liddington, 1998: 19). This was a close community where losing the good opinion of one of its members might, depending on the state of family relationships, lose the favour of all. In Lister's diary few Halifax families on her social circuit were exempt from her judgement, and all were found wanting in gentility and politeness, yet she continued to socialize amicably with them. The index to her diary for September 1816, summarized below, gives an idea of the many engagements and visits she carried out as a newly established resident at Shibden Hall:

September 1816

Wed. 4 Mr & Mrs Hudson called -

Fri. 6 Miss I Ralph called -

Sat. 7 ... Mrs & Miss Greenwood called

...

Tues. 10 Called on Mrs Wetherherd

Th. 12 ... Mrs Veitch came - her nephew Mr H Ridsdale took tea with us

...

Wed. 18 Dr[ank] tea a[t] N[orth]gate

Fri. 20 Miss A Walker & Miss Atkinson - & my uncle & aunt Lister called -

...

Tues. 24 Called on Ralphs, Greenwoods, Mrs Tom Rawson, Mrs Veitch, & at N[orth]gate.

Th. 26 Called at Crownest, Cliffhill, Lightcliffe & Mr Hudson's (SH:

7/ML/E/26/2).

Lister's diary, like Shackleton's and those of other eighteenth-century women diarists, while recording the pattern of social exchanges, also reinforced the minutiae of discriminatory discourses with which society policed itself. Vickery defines civil virtue as 'the proper sense of self combined with goodwill towards others'. Manners, in the eighteenth century, were not 'empty gestures, but the sincere expression of an ethical code' (Vickery, 1998: 197), and social polish was acquired through a combination of qualities: a thorough knowledge of appropriate ritual behaviour, inner civility, and good breeding. Lister applied this code vigorously. She regularly discovered vulgarity in members of the community, but fearing the same epithet might be applied by *them* to her, she carefully monitored the temper of polite Halifax society.

Her deference to the complexities and nuances of gentility, and her own interpretation of them, is well illustrated by an account of a meeting at Lightcliffe in April 1819.

Mrs Priestley was dressing to go to Cliff-hill, that Miss Griesdale & I had to introduce ourselves. I daresay we were 20 minutes together tête-à-tête & got on very well, but, after hearing so much of her, of her talent, of her spending 2/3 of her time in courtly society at Lowther Castle, etc, I was inwardly surprised to

see a fat, untidy, vulgar looking woman, apparently on the wrong side of 30, & whose manner of speaking & pronunciation were far from elegant, or occasionally, from the most proper. However, Mrs Priestley never set up her manners, on the contrary, mentioned her as a proof that first-rate society cannot always impart to those around them the first-rate polish which they themselves possess (Whitbread, 1988: 88).

Lister's reporting of the incident is revealing. The surprise she experiences on seeing Miss Griesdale implies that Mrs Priestley has slightly exaggerated her visitor's social connections in order to enhance her own standing. She plays with the notion that someone who spends '2/3 of her time in courtly society' must be slim, neat, genteel looking and under thirty, and declares her expectations confounded by the outward appearance of Miss Griesdale. Civility, she implies, should shine through from the inside producing a seemly exterior. Miss Griesdale does not observe the outward proprieties either; her manner of speaking is inelegant and improper. Lister does not blame Mrs Priestley entirely for her disappointment, however, for Miss Griesdale is only a hanger-on to first-rate society, and, as Mrs Priestley observed, perhaps in anticipation of just such a disappointment, gentility can rarely be imparted to those not born to it. Local opinion and Mrs Priestley's judgement, then, is vindicated.

This diary entry reveals subtle exchanges around the bounds of propriety. Lister professes herself shocked at first by Miss Griesdale's apparent lack of gentility, an observation whose accuracy is later manifested by Miss Griesdale's improper use of speech. Mrs Priestley's gentility is called into question as a result, although Lister judiciously finds it is unscathed. Through her own higher perceptions, Lister can claim superiority over both Miss Griesdale and Mrs Priestley in her knowledge and understanding of propriety and civility. All the to-ing and fro-ing about Miss Griesdale's

gentility comes, however, after Lister has declared that they ‘got on very well’. Seen through this remark, the account has a humorous, self-ironizing edge to it, for it is the fat, untidy, inelegant woman over thirty, not the fantasy created by her reputation, with whom Lister has ‘got on very well’. The sincerity of Lister’s attachment to the rules of social decorum is not called into question by this self-perception. The passage is designed to demonstrate her ability to apply these flexibly, to show herself gracious in testing circumstances and to illustrate the degree to which she has cultivated her natural inner civility.

### **Miss Browne and other loves**

Lister’s self-narrative of superior understanding and propriety allowed her to explore the attractions of young Halifax women in her writing whilst maintaining, as far as possible as subject-writer, a semi-detached authorial voice. For example, she recounts the charms of the Greenwood girls as if she were an objective though well-intentioned observer who receives their attentions reluctantly but, as is proper, kindly, while subjecting them to careful analysis and interpretation. The following extract from her 1817 diary, when she was 26, is a useful example of how Lister positions herself in relation to them.

Wednesday 7 May

A 1/4 before 6, went to drink tea at the Greenwoods’ at Cross-hills ... Music after tea. Several hits on the musical glasses by Miss Caroline Greenwood. A single song by Miss Susan Greenwood. An Italian duet by Miss Susan Greenwood & Miss Stavely. The 2nd of ‘See the Ocean Rising’, with Miss Susan Greenwood. ‘The Bewildered Maid’ & the 2nd to one of Braham’s<sup>15</sup> ditty

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<sup>15</sup> John Braham (1774-1856) was a both a successful tenor and a popular composer of the day.

with Miss A. Staveley by myself .... Miss Caroline Greenwood enlarged on the value she set on my notes & rally'd me on the shortness of my last. She would like to have long ones from me & longs to see some of my letters. Regretted the 'invisible enchantment' that kept me so closely at Shibden. Often longed to put on her things & join me when she saw me go past, & threatened to do so some time or other. In fact, she makes a dead set, to all which I return no encouragement, but am very civil. ... I took not the smallest notice of any of them ... They were a vulgar set & I was [glad] to get home ... (Whitbread, 1988: 4-5).

Lister adopts a distant, superior, and even ironic, position within the narrative. She constructs the episode from the point-of-view of a dispassionate but sophisticated narrator, who gains amusement from the provinciality of the occasion. The event is overlaid with a dry humour, Miss Caroline Greenwood's 'several hits on the musical glasses', for example, and her own duet of the fortuitously titled song, 'The Bewildered Maid', with Miss Staveley, who, she writes, had 'slender vocal powers' (Whitbread, 1988: 5), are rendered ludicrous by the terse amused tone of the narrative. It is a rhetorical style that presupposes a sympathetic, appreciative and familiar readership. As subject of the report, Lister receives the flattery that is owing to her, but, as narrator, she derides it as 'a dead set', and therefore not genteel. She represents herself as behaving impeccably throughout and thus confirms her own superiority.

The Greenwoods were easy targets for Lister's social contempt and for sharpening her literary wits on, but this did not prevent her from indulging in lewd fantasies about them, perhaps even facilitated them.<sup>16</sup> Even as she derided them in her diary, she continued to attend their tea-parties and musical evenings, and indeed there was no reason why her private accounts of their vulgarity should conflict with her continued friendship with them,

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<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 4 and Lister's fantasy meeting with Caroline Greenwood on Skircoat Moor.



or that her literary fantasies should reflect her public acts or words. The demands on her narrative ingenuity were a little more complicated, however, when it came to Miss Browne, a young woman with whom, according to her diary, Lister was quite obsessed between the years 1817 and 1819.

Lister met Maria Browne, the daughter of a self-made businessman, at a course of lectures in Halifax, and quickly became enamoured of her. Browne appeared to embody many of the qualities of inner civility despite her situation in life: 'Miss Browne is wonderful ... handsome, or rather, interesting, gentle in her manners, entirely free from any sort of affectation & much more ladylike than any girl I have seen hereabouts' (Whitbread, 1988: 41). Here a dilemma arose between Lister's privately articulated feelings and her self-narrative of fine birth. It would breach the bounds of propriety (at least according to the standards of Lister's enhanced ancestral history) for her to call on Browne. So pressing was her anxiety in this matter that she 'dreamt of being in Miss Browne's house ... & witnessing the vulgarity of her mother'. She comforted herself, however, with the reassurance that her own natural civility would protect her from this infatuation: 'let me think or scheme what I may, I shall never allow myself to *do* anything beyond the folly of talking to, & perhaps walking a little way with her' (Whitbread, 1988: 42). Such self-counselling shows how important the diary was to her negotiating the perilous path between moral superiority and social transgression in her self-fashioning.

Lister candidly reveals in her diary that much of the damaging fallout from this flirtation came as a result of a miscalculation based on that self-narrative of elevated social position. The Brownes, though *nouveau*, were accepted in Halifax society and socialized with many of the established families, like the Greenwoods and the Edwards at Pye Nest (Whitbread, 1988: 58). Lister recounts that she constantly put herself in the way of meeting Browne, waiting for her outside the library, attending lectures and even passing by her house, but

steadfastly refused to call on her or invite her to Shibden Hall. She noted the ways this neglect was received by people she regarded as below her socially: the Greenwoods 'rallied' her about the liaison; Tom Rawson avoided joining her in a walk; Browne's friend, Miss Kelly, gave her 'a cool salutation'. She wrote that she 'felt as if I wished to hide my diminished head' and considered herself obliged to give Browne some explanation: 'I said I should have been most happy to see them at Shibden Hall but that my uncle & aunt visited so little ... She seemed to think this a thing of course with elderly people but was certainly pleased I had made the speech' (Whitbread, 1988: 46-7). Lister also excused herself from calling on the Brownes: 'I told her ... I should have great pleasure in doing so, but that my uncle & aunt visited so little we never made any new acquaintances. She still said, "But you might call," & I heard her mutter something about, "I should not trouble your uncle much"' (Whitbread, 1988: 51). Lister's account of this explanation recognizes the conflict between her infatuation and her amour propre. Browne, she wrote, 'had a lovely colour, was clad in robes of virgin white & looked altogether beautiful', but back at Shibden, 'beyond the pale of beauty's fascination', her manner and words took on a more invidious note: 'she ... [should] have said less about my calling, assured that I should call if I chose. Besides, she would recollect it is my place to offer the thing, not hers to ask it' (Whitbread, 1988: 51). Here her rhetorical narrative of infatuation intermingles with a more subjective point-of-view of offended dignity. The former position, couched in the poetic language of courtly love, tends to lose its power in the harsh light of the latter's apparent candour, and its appeal to rules of propriety lends it a more authoritative air.

Lister produces a dramatic resolution to this conflict, describing herself in an imperious act, characteristic of her developing self-narrative. She calls on Browne, thus reasserting her belief in good breeding and that a truly genteel person could not act with impropriety.

At the same time, she calls the bluff of the Halifax gossips who questioned her interest in Browne and accused her of snobbery. She describes her announcement of the visit to Caroline Greenwood, whom she regarded as one of the principal perpetrators of the innuendo, in tones of self-satisfaction: 'I said that, in consequence of hearing a report of my choosing to walk with Miss Browne, yet not to call on her I had called & sat half an hour with her & meant to do myself the honour of calling again. She seemed astonished & incredulous ... She asked if the ladies had returned the call. I answered Miss Browne had been ill. She asked how I liked 'scrawk', Mrs Browne. I said ... Very well, for I had heard so much of her "slobbering in the pot" etc, I scarce expected to find her presentable' (Whitbread, 1988: 88). The violent language Greenwood reportedly used of Mrs Browne indicates the intensity with which social divisions were felt.

This episode, like the meeting with Miss Griesdale (an occasion it predates by only six days), reveals the negotiations and mediations around the bounds of propriety defined by local networks. Lister recorded or reworked them in her diary; whether she performed them in real life is open to question. But in her writing she sought to reassert her lost dignity by appealing to the rules of civility, to redefine her relationship to the local community, and even to redraw those bounds, while retaining the ability to pursue her flirtation. The diary entries I have examined here demonstrate how she constructed a record, analysis and interpretation of events, fantasies and thoughts through which she could monitor social attitudes and adjust her own self-narrative to subtly shifting demands. They are interesting for the self-consciousness with which Lister produces her accounts and for their transparency, which clearly reveals the co-existence of different narrative strands. In re-producing her life as a literary event, Lister demonstrated to herself her ability to manage her self, and helped create the conditions in which her real (as opposed to her literary) life was played out.

### Lister as aspiring gentleman

Lister's careful reinscription of family history required the constant fuelling of overt expenditure, on, for example, improvements to the hall and grounds, engaging a footman, travel and lodgings. Although she was always mulling over plans for financial advancement, and kept careful business accounts, she sometimes projected a devil-may-care attitude to her economic survival, in keeping with her self-construction as a minor aristocrat. When she wrote in her diary in 1832 that, after the expense of her new rustic walk and thatched hut, she 'must go & live on bread and water' she added jauntily, 'whether I shall do so or not is doubtful' (Liddington, 1994: 39).

The diary and letters suggest that this developing narrative of elevated social rank demanded, and got, collusion from Lister's lovers. It proved valuable, too, in reconciling public and private doubts about her sexuality. In September 1825, for example, Lister and her aunt were staying at the Great Hotel, Buxton, to enable Aunt Anne to take the waters for her rheumatism, when Marianna Belcombe arrived unexpectedly. Lister recounts the visit in a series of dramatic episodes. Marianna's sudden absence from Lawton Hall caused an estrangement from her husband, Charles Lawton, whom, in her haste to catechize Lister about her affair with Maria Barlow, she had left behind without explanation for her absence. Belcombe moved into the rooms hired by the Listers and into Anne Lister's bed. Lawton's decision to follow his wife to Buxton a few days later caused all parties consternation and embarrassment. Lister reported that 'Charles turned very pale when Marianna mentioned his going into our room but [she] assured him there was no earthly reason why he should not & my aunt had sent a civil message to say she should be glad to see him' (Whitbread, 1992: 126-7). Lister quickly constructs Lawton's behaviour as breaching the bounds of propriety and describes herself cutting *him* on his return visit to

the hotel: ‘... Charles came up to us at the bottom of the stairs [to our rooms]. I turned my back. Stood looking at the glass a moment or 2 as if nobody but ourselves were there then quietly told Marianna she had better go ... [into] the arcade & walked forwards into my aunt’s rooms’ (Whitbread, 1992: 130). Once Lawton had left, Lister’s diary details a cut-and-fill operation conducted apparently by both women to reconstruct this regrettable appearance in their favour. The focus of this exercise was Colonel and Mrs Tryon, the latter ‘a pleasant and ladylike’ person (Whitbread, 1992: 130), upon whom they had called during their stay in Buxton but who unfortunately were also acquainted with Lawton.

Colonel & Mrs Tryon having called on us, we met them & walked up & down the arcade near an hour. I with Mrs Tryon in close confab about Charles. I spoke handsomely of him, for she had known him in his first wife’s lifetime. I explained gently how mistaken was Marianna’s estimate of his character & vindicated her calmly and, I fancied, successfully. All the while, it seems, Colonel Tryon was praising me. Wondered I had never married. Marianna hinted at my having had a disappointment some years [ago]. Had then put on mourning. Would never take it off & never marry. He asked if I was of a county family. Marianna said yes, [I] could count as many generations as most could & was very aristocratic. The Tryons quite pleased with me, for Marianna & I mutually told all we had said & heard. We, delighted they did not come sooner. They would have had too much of our society and been a bore that we could scarcely have avoided ... (Whitbread, 1992: 131).

The passage reveals the complexity of Lister’s literary production of her narrative of social class, and, indeed, of gender, for her competitive behaviour towards Charles, and subsequent oiling of the Tryons, makes her appear to be aspiring to the status of a *gentleman*, rather than *gentlewoman*. She situates herself and Belcombe as manipulators of

the conventional and unimaginative Tryons, outsmarting them at their own genteel game of social manoeuvring. In the meanwhile, the two women's emotional intimacy is increased by their apparently unspoken agreement to deceive their visitors, while the detail of those deceptions alludes to their physical intimacy in a way of which only they could be aware. Belcombe knew well that Lister did not wear black as a sign of 'mourning' for a lost love, but rather as an outward signifier of both class and sexual identity.<sup>17</sup>

Lister and Belcombe each deflect the Tryons' possible suspicions about the sexual nature of their relationship by referring to conventional class values. Lister 'gently' relieves Mrs Tryon of her good opinion of Lawton's respectability, and Belcombe elevates Lister to the aristocracy. Lister is the Byronic hero of this scene, sneering at the tedious conventions of the minor gentry, as she aspires to greater things for herself. Belcombe is her loyal female sidekick, whose speeches can be construed as deliberately designed to mislead those unfortunate representatives of polite society, the Tryons. Lister seems as delighted with Belcombe's fib about her lost love as with the invention for her of an aristocratic lineage, although this conflation reveals the fragility of the latter claim. At the same time that Charles Lawton's social character is subtly maligned, Lister's is elevated, so that the balance of what is apprehended as respectable behaviour shifts in favour of Lister. The Tryons, who provide the audience for the playlet Lister and Belcombe enact, are then dismissed in Lister's narrative as 'boring', for their social position is compromised by their being witnesses to the inconsistencies in hers.

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<sup>17</sup> The association of black clothing, which Lister had 'made up [her] mind always to wear' in 1817, (Whitbread, 1988: 9), with a kind of heroic, sexy, autocratic, learned, but slightly skewed masculinity, was reinforced by the Byronic model, and by Lady Eleanor Butler, who also adopted that sartorial code.

### The changing experience of foreign travel

The episode with the Tryons is typical of the mediations Lister, with the occasional assistance of her lovers, engaged in as she observed, or renegotiated, the conventional values subscribed to by her West Riding neighbours. Lister suggests in her diary that her trip to France in 1824 was the catalyst for her changed attitudes towards them. (The earlier episode involving Maria Browne seems to suggest that she already thought them beneath her, but Lister evidently regarded her attitudes at that time as tolerant.) She had spent three weeks in France with her aunt in 1819, but this time she was accompanied only by her maid, Elizabeth Cordingley, and stayed for seven months. She subsequently ascribed to the experience a deepening distaste for the impropriety of Halifax society. A party in April 1825, shortly after her return home, elicited the following response in her diary: ‘Mrs W. Rawson & the whole set a vulgar looking party. Mary Priestley much the best of them. I am much quieter & graver, I fancy, than they used to see me before I went. Vulgarify gravifies & sickens me more than ever’ (Whitbread, 1992: 99). In a letter to Maria Barlow, who had remained behind in Paris, Lister wrote: ‘I must confess between ourselves, the *dowdyism* of the people one sees afloat in London, is very striking after a seven months’ sojourn in Paris.’ Commenting of an acquaintance that she ‘could never have looked so elegant had she not lived abroad’, Lister identified the point of change: ‘I was not aware of this till my return home. I now feel I am improved’, adding, however, that she was still ‘sufficiently proud of my country and thoroughly English and thoroughly Yorkshire at heart’ (Green, 1992: 86). Her realization of the narrowness and provincialism of her hometown even while nostalgically recalling her county and country was not uncommon to women travellers of the period. Anna Jameson in her autobiographical writings identified Italy and ‘the witchery of these deep blue skies’ as performing a kind of therapeutic magic

on her 'sick heart', but still identified strongly with 'England - dear England' (quoted in Gilroy, 1997: 35).

Lister's social contacts during her Paris stay were, however, limited and not particularly elevated, so that her judgement seems to have been formed from observation rather than direct participation in Parisian life. But although her first impression of the other guests at her pension was that there was 'not much style about any of them' (Whitbread, 1992: 12), her usual outbursts about vulgarity seemed to be suspended by the exciting unfamiliarity of the setting. She wrote to her aunt giving Mrs Barlow's credentials in a rather eager, self-justifying manner: 'a widow ... whose husband commanded the 61st regt at the battle of Salamanca, and was killed there.... [She] is ladylike; and her connections seem very good' (Green, 1992: 73), but otherwise appeared relaxed about her fellow lodgers' social status. She relates that on the third evening of her visit, she formed part of a motley company that included Mrs Barlow, her landlords, M. and Mme de Boyve, 'Mr Franks, an Irishman' and 'a French captain of the Garde du Corps, a de St Aubun' who was 'a striking example of forward foppery', a party that Lister would have found intolerably dull in Halifax, yet in this context describes as 'a beautiful evening' (Whitbread 1992: 13). In self-analytical mode, she seems startled by her own levels of tolerance, 'In mannerism I have certainly the advantage of all our English party. The ease I feel ½ surprises myself' (Whitbread, 1992: 15), but quickly feels cosy enough to designate the other guests, 'family', 'no strangers, only our own family party tonight' (Whitbread 1992: 16).

Whitbread remarks on the 'almost hermetic group of women' living at Lister's pension among whom 'a great deal of flirtatious touching, holding of hands and kissing had taken place'. She notes that of the women who competed for Lister's amorous attentions there, Mrs Barlow was the most impecunious, 'living as she did on a widow's pension of £80 a year and a government gratuity of £250 a year' (Whitbread, 1992: 31). The isolation of a



group of women whose language, culture and class separated them from social intercourse in a strange city may help to explain the heightened sexual tensions generated in the pension, as well as Lister's tolerance of their company. This was one of the few occasions when she felt herself liberated not only from the monitoring eyes of English society, but from the need for meticulous self-control. Her carefree flirtations and reckless sexual adventures are perhaps unsurprising, for Paris offered a relaxed, even libertine, atmosphere to the foreign traveller as the enthusiastic tone of Lister's diary attests. At the Porte St Martin theatre, for example, she saw 'dancing & wonderful feats of balancing & strength, wrestling & fine play of muscles by 4 men dressed in flesh-coloured web so as to look almost as if naked, having merely smart shining middle cloths round them. Bits, too, of the same tinsel on their breasts.' Aware of a possible lapse in propriety by her attendance at this event, she concluded, 'Surely all this would have seemed ridiculous to most English people but appeared to highly delight the French' (Whitbread, 1992: 38).

Satisfying as Lister's accounts of her Paris pension clearly are to her self-production, they do not entirely explain the changes she felt had taken place in her perceptions during her stay in France. Despite the apparently lax laws regulating places of entertainment and street culture, in many ways France's social structure was more rigid than England's. De Saussure wrote in 1727 that 'in England commerce is not looked down upon as being derogatory, as it is in France and Germany' (quoted in Vickery, 1998: 32-3). Lister, as a foreigner living largely with other foreigners, experienced little of this, and yet she felt its presence in the tales of her French acquaintances. The mixture of social inflexibility and libertinage suited her very well, for she could practice her self-narrative without the tiresome intrusion of close neighbours. She *felt* that the experience changed her, 'the more we see of the world, the more we see of the mere surface of different countries, the more our minds are enlarged, and the more our natural advantages are developed' (Green, 1992:

79). The protracted absence from the familiar vulgarities of home and the thrill of dwelling in a fashionable European city for seven months caused her to reflect on both her amorous and social objectives:

I leave Paris, said I to myself, with sentiments how different from those with which I arrived. My eye was accustomed to all it saw - it was no longer a stranger nor found fault as before with all that differed from that it left at home. Imperfectly as I speak the language, I felt almost at home in Paris & seemed to feel so in France. ... The towns did not seem shabby nor did I care for the want of hedges. In fact, I thought I could live abroad very well with someone I loved (Whitbread, 1992: 88).

Amanda Gilroy identifies the sympathetic response of early nineteenth-century women travel-writers to foreign countries as ‘an impulse towards deterritorialization’ which is played out in both geographical and literary journeys, where ‘the dissolution of the boundaries between real and metaphorical space is extended’ by self-narrative (Gilroy, 1997: 34-5). Lister herself appears to have felt changed, and liberated, by the experience of travel, for, as the diary extract above indicates, she left Paris ‘no longer a stranger’ who ‘found fault with all’, but ‘seemed to feel free’, an experience she rarely describes.

### **The Shibden inheritance and other social developments**

Constant absences from Shibden during the 1820s and a concentration on the cultivation of well-connected and titled friends seemed to indicate a growing distance between Lister and Halifax society, although during her brief appearances there she tried to maintain the status quo, by reminding them of her social importance: ‘30 August 1828 Sent my kind remembrances by Mrs Priestley to the Misses Walkers of Crow Nest, & that it would give

me always great pleasure to see them, and I should have been most happy to call, but their brother had not called on my father, and therefore I felt an awkwardness about doing it' (Whitbread, 1998: 35). A party at the English Embassy on 31 December 1829, to which she was invited by the English Ambassador, Lord Stuart de Rothesay, marked the zenith of Lister's social career, situating her at last within the *élite* society she considered her natural habitat. She described the event in a breathless letter to Marianna Belcombe: 'Titles English and foreign, stars, garters, etc, etc, a brilliant assemblage. I went with the Cte. and Ctesse de Noé. He wore his orders, and looked a very courtly beau - she all civility to your humble servant. Capital people to be with, knowing everyone. Never was I so *entourée de noblesse*. ... Miss Hobart dancing with the Duc de Chartres [son of Louis Philippe]' (Green, 1992: 115). This was a far cry from the Greenwoods' tea-parties, and the shift was marked by a suitably gracious tone in Lister's correspondence. In a letter to her aunt from Brussels in August 1829, she wrote: 'Yesterday evening we were at the little theatre in the park, after dining at Lord Orford's. Sir Ch[arle]s [Bagot, member of the Privy Council] & Lady Bagot are at the Hague ... Today ... we met the King [William I of Holland] and one of the Princes as we returned. Lord Lindsay spent the evening with us' (Green 1992: 119-20). This milieu was so appealing to Lister that she even briefly considered '*my marrying for rank some old peer of seventy*' (Liddington, 1998: 23), a peculiar, if momentary reversal of her avowed life-intentions.

Instead, she began to explore more earnestly the idea of finding a female life-companion of suitable rank and fortune, and set her sights on Vere Hobart, the grand-niece of Lady Louisa Stuart, whom she met through her Scottish friend, Sibella Maclean. In November, Lister and Hobart set out to overwinter in Hastings. Their stay together lasted until late April 1832, during which time Lister made a 'dead set', as she had once described Caroline Greenwood's attentions to her (Whitbread, 1988: 5), at Vere Hobart. The encoded

diary entries for this period, while meticulously detailing Lister's pursuit of the genteel Hobart, are cautious, restrained and even hesitant, lacking the assurance of her pronouncements on other potential lovers. An entry of 17 November 1831 depicts Lister taking an unusually passive role in the relationship:

*I had been in good spirits after dinner which she rather ch[e]cked so I shut my eyes & dozed while she played & was very quiet afterwards just before going to bed she took from the bosom of her gown ... a paper containing three little curls of her hair saying somehow or other while she shewed & held them out to me she did not want them I took the paper put it into the breast of my gown saying you will never see these again (SH: 7/ML/E).*

The narrative focus has swung in the direction of Vere Hobart, with Lister as the rather nervous and admiring narrator, surveying and recording Hobart's words and actions but less frequently offering analysis and interpretation of them. This is implicit in the tone and in the carelessly worded rather jumbled construction of the passages, as in this coded entry for 20 November 1831:

*... told Miss H while at the piano that as to our talk of Salona [sic] it was a facon de parler for other things meaning living together but as to our going to Naples it was within the pale of possibility that I could not go that I could but do one of two things she could not understand this if not on account of my father I said perhaps I should tell before the first of April I meant that perhaps before next winter I must decide whether to take M[arianna] or give her up before coffee Miss H talk [sic] more than usual of herself & Charles Stuart thinks his serious love gone off by this time perhaps if not she may be won spite of her objection of his seven years younger & being her cousin ... (SH:7/ML/E).*

Lister observes this quiet, reserved tone in both coded and unencoded diary entries throughout their sojourn together. The acerbic language and rapid pace of the earlier diary which she so often employed to define her social identity has given way to a measured, leisurely but less self-assured style, in which Lister appears unusually as a supplicant. The disjuncture between the social and sexual confidence of Lister's self-construction and the candour of her self-revelation is, however, well-controlled, and perhaps self-conscious, for it drives the narrative with its wry, self-ironizing tone. Even an account of her being wrong-footed by Hobart is produced in a soft, underplayed manner, de-emphasizing what is in fact a rebuke.

*All going on very well she offered to rub my leg [w]arm for rheumatism I said something else would do better & kissed a little mole on the back neck I had kissed this morning on leaving & she took it all very well till in my fun following her to the fire & back she laughed & said I was tiresome & I said oh I should teaze her so all my life on which she said rather more gravely good humouredly but as if really in earnest she hoped not what was not the way of both could not be agreeable & that was not her way I quietly said she would get into her way in time I did not seem to take very much notice but immediately took my book (SH: 7/ML/E, 26 November 1831).*

The irony of Lister's trying to reassert control by seeming to take no notice and by taking up her book is cut across by the obvious impropriety of her scarcely-veiled sexual suggestions to Hobart, and by the undercurrent of admiration for Hobart's dignified response, indicated by the careful reproduction of her words, and, even more perhaps, by the description of her tone. Hobart speaks 'gravely', 'good humouredly', but 'as if really in earnest'. This, the narrative implies, is true civility, by whose standards the subject-narrator, despite her quiet reply, appears facetious, uncivil and out of control.

Indeed, Lister's narrative of her courtship of Hobart is produced rather like an Austenesque social comedy, in which she casts herself as gauche and socially inept, constantly striving for the upper hand and congratulating herself on her little successes, while Hobart effortlessly maintains the highest standards of gentility. She writes of one encounter, for example, '*the very civil gravity of my countenance never relaxed I have been properly talkative gravely but pointedly civil & am satisfied with myself this morning.*' Yet a little later in the day she reports losing the game again: '*Miss H very smiling ... put her foot upon the sofa I always used to go & sit by her perhaps she half expected it or tried whether I would or not of course I kept aloof but seeing her laughing asked why she made no answer & I came away*' (SH: 7/ML/E, 2 December 1831). Here the pitiful is mixed with the comic. Lister is defeated by Hobart's superior command of propriety, yet, despite continual setbacks, her pursuit lasted till April 1832 when Hobart accepted an offer of marriage from a suitor, Captain Cameron.<sup>18</sup> Lister, sadly reassessing her prospects in high society, concluded with some of her old shrewdness that her income simply was 'not enough' (RAM 67).

She continued to monitor what she called her '*gaucherie*' in elevated company through her diary (quoted in Brothers, 1996: 115), fearing perhaps that any faux-pas might break down her painstakingly established self-construction as a woman of high rank and fashion. On a visit to London in 1833, for example, she describes the range of emotions occasioned by an unexpected visit from the Countess of Mexborough and Lady Savile: '*I had, at the moment, congratulated myself on having never before felt so at ease with these people ... till all this comfort vanished and the bugbear gaucherie haunted me again at the thought*

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<sup>18</sup> Hobart married Donald Cameron of Lochiel on 31 July 1832 and was granted a title in September 1832 by virtue of her half-brother being the 5th Earl of Buckinghamshire (Brothers, 1996: 124n).

*that I ought not to have shown them into my bedroom as if intimate with them ...* (quoted in Brothers, 1996: 117).

Having had her fingers burned by Vere Hobart's rejection, Lister seems thereafter to have confined her love affairs to the genteel society of the minor gentry, professional and middle-class in the neighbourhood of Shibden Hall.

### **Courtship and 'marriage' with Anne Walker**

Lister's family links with Halifax were not extensive. Unlike most of the local Halifax families, the Listers were not related to most of their neighbours and they produced no progeny who could intermarry. Her land and building works and absences from Shibden Hall provided a source of gossip for her Halifax neighbours, but did not invite the kind of interest occasioned by blood ties.

Lister's courtship of Anne Walker took her into the dangerous territory of local family relationships. As I have shown in Chapter 4, the liaison Lister proposed to Anne Walker was in many ways like a marriage, though with a greater degree of equality between the parties. They were to make wills in each other's favour, share property and income, and live together. The proposals met with incredulity, confusion and hostility in the country houses around Shibden, where nearly everyone was related, however distantly, to Walker, who was, by 1831, a wealthy woman.<sup>19</sup> On the death of her brother in 1830 Walker and her sister inherited his personal estate of around £45,000, which together with the canal shares and capital bequeathed by her father, gave her a very respectable annual income. There had long been rumours of Walker's mental instability which Lister succinctly

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<sup>19</sup> Jill Liddington has documented in detail the conflict and difficulties that arose from Lister's interest in Walker in *Female Fortune*, and I summarize them only briefly here (Liddington, 1998: 27-56).

delineated in a coded section of her 1828 diary: *'Young Miss Walker's illness too likely to be insanity - her mind warped on religion -she thinks she cannot live - has led a wicked life etc. Had something of this sort of thing occasioned by illness at seventeen, but slighter - the illness seems to be in fact a gradual tendency to mental derangement'* (Liddington 1998: 35).

In 1832, Lister began calling on Walker. After a visit in August, she reported: *'We got on very well together. Thought I, as I have several times done before of late, "Shall I try and make up to her"'* (Liddington, 1998: 60). A few days later, returning to a favourite role as an experienced and ruthless lover, she wrote, *'Thought I, "she little dreams what is in my mind - to make up to her. She has money and this might make up for rank" ... The thought as I returned amused and interested me'* (Liddington, 1998: 61). The shift in tone of these entries from the awkward, ill-expressed and unreflective passages during her courtship of Vere Hobart is striking. Lister once again represents herself in swaggering mode as pro-active, manipulative, mercenary and sexually predatory. In the novelistic or episodic construction of her diary, she produces her thoughts as tagged speech, and offers an interpretation of the occasion for the reader, *'the thought ... amused ... me'*. The script she now begins to follow is familiar as part of her continuing self-narrative, and she reverts to her former procedure of monitoring society's responses. A visit to the Priestley's elicited the following passage in crypt hand: *'I got on as usual [as] friendly as ever - tho' at first it struck me [what] she thought of my seeing so much of Miss Walker? Perhaps the Priestleys will think of it by and by? Miss W- and I do certainly get on marvellously; she seems quite confidential and glad to see me - told me of her plans of altering Cliff-hill grounds etc.'* And she self-consciously returned to her practice of self-surveillance: *'Who knows how it might end. I shall be wary this time'* (Liddington, 1998: 61).



The courtship proceeded slowly with Walker reluctant and nervous and Lister ever more pressing, but in January 1834 Anne Walker agreed at last to Lister's proposal. Their new wills were drawn up, making each the life tenant of the other's estate. After a tour of France and Switzerland with Lister from June to September, Walker moved in to Shibden Hall. Lister's tone, when she writes in her diary of Anne Walker's agreement to her proposal of life-companionship, is almost self-parodying: '*Our liaison is now established ... I am reprovided [for] & the object of my choice have perhaps three thousand a year or near it - probably two-thirds at her own disposal*' (Liddington, 1994: 42). The combination of the words 'liaison' and 'reprovided' makes a clear connection between her amorous and financial ambitions. 'Liaison' would almost certainly have indicated a sexual connection. 'Reprovided' not only suggests a return to former economic means (a replacement of money spent), subsistence, but without 'for', which is Liddington's addition, gives the impression of something taken, rather than something bestowed, as if Walker's money is a prize owed to Lister for her amorous exertions.

### Burning effigies

Once they had set up a joint household at Shibden Hall, Lister and Walker kept up the social round as far as possible, although there was some coolness among the local community towards Lister. Her involvement as a diehard Tory in the campaign to re-elect the Hon. James Wortley Montagu,<sup>20</sup> and her increasing interference in Anne Walker's business and estate dealings, brought her into conflict with Walker's relatives and local Whig merchants (who in many cases were one and the same), which culminated in two public expressions of open hostility towards their relationship. Liddington ascribes these

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<sup>20</sup> The nephew of Lister's old friend, Lady Stuart.

principally to opposition to Lister's political activism and resentment of her as a landowner, arguing that 'their lesbian sexuality was ... symbolically deployed to warn them off their high Tory political activity, rather than vice versa' (Liddington, 1998: 247).<sup>21</sup> I believe, however, that the meaning of the two events runs deeper than Liddington suggests.

The first of these inimical attentions was an announcement in the local paper on 10 January 1835, just after the election in which Lister's Tory candidate bested the Whigs:

Washington took coffee with us, and with some humming and ah-ing, pulled out of his pocket today's Leed's Mercury containing among the marriages of Wednesday last: 'Same day, at the parish Church H-x, Captain Tom Lister of Shibden Hall to Miss Anne Walker, late of Lidget, near the same place'. I smiled and said it was very good - read it aloud to A- who also smiled and then took up the paper and read the skit to my aunt, and on returning the paper to W- begged him to give it to us when he had done with it - he said he would and seemed agreeably surprised to find what was probably meant to annoy, taken so quietly and with such mere amusement (Liddington, 1998: 143, emphasis in original).

Lister recounts the event in typically dry fashion, noting that '*A- did not like the joke*' (Liddington, 1998: 143). The incident was followed two days later by the receipt of 'an anonymous letter ... from H-x, directed to "Captain Lister, Shibden Hall, Halifax", containing the extract from the Leed's Mercury ... and concluding "we beg to congratulate the parties on their happy connection". Probably meant to *annoy*, but, if so, a failure' (Liddington, 1998: 143-4, emphasis in original). The announcement was repeated in the *Halifax Guardian* and the *York Chronicle*, and two months later, on 15 March, the post brought 'an anonymous letter (3 pages) with promise of another to A[nne Walker];

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<sup>21</sup> I am not sure what 'vice versa' means in this context. It seems unlikely that the two women's high Toryism could have been 'deployed to warn them off' their lesbian relationship.

extreme abuse of me - pity for A-; sure she is unhappy & the writer will do all to aid her getting away from me & Shibden' (Liddington, 1998: 156).

This was the second time that Lister had been harassed via newspapers and anonymous letters. In 1819, when she was 28, she had received several letters written under the pseudonym, William Townsend: 'As I understand you advertised in the *Leed's Mercury* for a husband ...' (Whitbread, 1988: 106). She was later physically assaulted by a young man she believed to be the letter-writer and took the matter to a solicitor (Whitbread, 1988: 113-5). The 1835 campaign of harassment resembled the earlier one, though it seemed more carefully organized. Both relied upon the embarrassment a public announcement of Lister's sexuality would cause her, and, in the latter case, Walker and her friends and relations. In each case the persecutor narrowed his target, with follow-up anonymous letters addressed to Lister personally at her home. This two-pronged assault ensured that its object would not fail to appreciate the public nature of the announcement, and would also experience a direct personal threat. In common with the earlier event, the focus in 1835 was Lister's sexual identity, though on this occasion it encompassed Anne Walker's too. Her designation as Captain Tom Lister alluded both to her masculine appearance and to the eighteenth-century slang word for lesbian, 'tommy'.<sup>22</sup> 'Marriage' and 'happy connection', like 'sweetheart', are clearly meant to refer to a sexual relationship.

Liddington concludes that the March letter was written 'from a genuine well-wisher who had seen the marriage "announcement" in the *Guardian* and felt that Anne Walker did indeed need rescuing from Shibden', and that the announcement was 'in the heightened political atmosphere ... a rather spiteful way to try to curb Anne's electoral activity' (Liddington, 1998: 156). However, although electoral anger may account for the timing of

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<sup>22</sup> Donoghue cites many cases of variants of *tommy*, or *tomboy*, being used in the eighteenth century for a masculine or wayward girl. *An Etymological English Dictionary* (c.1745) glosses tomboy as 'a wanton froliksom young woman' (Anonymous, c.1745).

the attack, for Tories were the butt of a number of violent assaults during and after the election in Halifax, it does not explain its tone, its content, nor its careful stage-management. Lister's detractors picked out her sexuality as her vulnerable point. Although this was already known and accepted by her family and friends, the action suggests that it was designed to emphasize the unnaturalness of her relationship with Anne Walker, whose friends and relations already regarded it as questionable and were likely to be provoked to open opposition to it, and thus, perhaps, to Lister. Her commercial and political activities, which often caused local conflict, could all have been subjects of satire, but these were commonplaces and did not transgress rules of propriety.

The second event, which occurred in March 1836 in the wake of serious property disputes between Lister (acting on behalf of Walker) and the Rawsons, a local merchant family, picks up on details of the earlier attack, but in a manner altogether more atavistic, archetypal. Lister described it laconically in her diary: 'Mr Rawson set the people on, & treated the[m] to rum-tea-drinking ... & the people burnt A- & me in effigy, he thinks it was last Tuesday. Strange piece of business on the part of Mr Rawson ...' (Liddington, 1998: 221). Liddington questions whether Lister 'would have interpreted its significance as an attack upon her secret intimacy with Anne Walker as much as upon their active intrusion into the traditionally male world of coal-mining and electoral politics?' (Liddington, 1998: 222). She points out that effigy-burning was not uncommon, and that an effigy of Branwell Brontë, an active Tory, was burned after the 1837 election.<sup>23</sup> However, the significance of the event lies not so much in Lister's conscious articulation of the symbolism of the event, but in its intention and unconscious effect. There is no doubt that the actions of the two women, led by Lister, in trying to prevent the use of a public well on

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<sup>23</sup> In July 1837, 'Branwell's effigy, bearing a herring in one hand and a potato in the other, in allusion to his nationality, was carried through the main street of Haworth and afterwards burned' (quoted in Barker, 1994: 270).

Walker's land by poisoning it with tar, had antagonised the neighbourhood. The effigy-burning, however, although a method of political protest, had more startling associations. The fact that it was a *double* burning emphasized the 'marriage' or 'connection' between Lister and Walker that had already been pilloried in the newspaper announcement. The practice of parading two straw-stuffed effigies representing an adulterous or scandalous couple through the streets of their home-town, and burning them, preferably before the windows of the offending pair, was still current in nineteenth-century Yorkshire.<sup>24</sup> Known as 'Riding the Stang', it is described in Halliwell's 1889 *Dictionary* as 'a custom well known throughout the North' (Halliwell, 1889).<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the practice was common to many parts of England and Wales,<sup>26</sup> and its reference to sympathetic witchcraft, by which those represented are harmed (or cured) by attentions to their effigies, is a motif in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) where it is called a 'skimmity-ride' (Hardy, 1974: 290).<sup>27</sup> The nature of such an attack is significant for both perpetrators and victims, for it enacts everyone's fears, but releases only those of the former. Although, as Liddington suggests, Lister may not necessarily have considered the obvious symbolism of the burning, its resonances, both in anticipation and retrospective contemplation, are to be felt throughout the diary. It was against this kind of attack that Lister prepared herself by self-injunction: 'Be firm. Learn to have nerve to protect myself & make the best of things.' The diary's function in this relational struggle is explicit: 'It is always a relief to me to write down what I feel' (Whitbread 1988:101).

<sup>24</sup> A letter in the *Dalesman*, March 1992, relates how, 'in the mid-1800s', the writer's grandfather from Pickering, North Yorkshire, 'was involved in a "Riding" at the age of eleven ... [when] the locals borrowed his father's cart and put the straw effigies in it to parade around the village' (Dalesman, 1992). Roy Palmer also writes of a case in Northallerton, North Yorkshire (Palmer, 1995: 76).

<sup>25</sup> The Stang was a wooden bar or pole, from which the effigies were suspended, or the shaft of a cart, on which they were seated.

<sup>26</sup> Several well-substantiated cases of scandalous couples being burned in effigy in the Welsh Border area in the 1880s are reported by Jacqueline Simpson in *The Folklore of the Welsh Border* (1976). Palmer records a skimmington in Dorset as late as 1917, which had to be broken up by police (Palmer, 1995: 77).

<sup>27</sup> The effigies of Henchard and Lucetta, the adulterous couple, are thrown into the river, prefiguring their early deaths.

Lister's lack of comment on the incident is consistent with other occasions on which she had been under attack for her sexuality. The diary entry recording the effigy-burning includes the terse encoded sentence: '*A- very low all today & begins to look wretchedly & will hardly take wine fearing to take too much*' (Liddington, 1998: 221). It oddly echoes Lister's response to the verbal abuse she experienced on Cunnery Lane as a young woman in 1818, 'I know not how it is but I feel low this evening' (Whitbread, 1988: 49), though transposing it to Anne Walker.

### Conclusion

Lister's writings demonstrate how important it was for her to establish a narrative that encompassed the self in relation to society. Like Elizabeth Shackleton's diary, Lister's literary production contributed to the maintenance of the networks of polite society, supporting their values, observing their conventions, even while seeking subtly to redefine them. There are clear signs of shifts and accommodations taking place within that narrative, as Lister negotiated the difficult areas between her unconventional sexual identity and the conservative networks of the minor gentry of Halifax, York and beyond, within which she situated that self-narrative. The family history she reinvented in her diary and letters supported and was reinforced by her dreams of social and sexual power. The narrative of ancient lineage complemented her self-construction as swashbuckling sexual predator, the two themes converging seamlessly during her stay in France, though co-existing more uneasily in her dealings with Vere Hobart, where the part of the courtly lover was more politic. The presentation of these roles required meticulous self-management and self-surveillance in respect of her home circles. Whether this account of herself was readily received by these circles is open to question. Lister called on Henrietta

Crompton in 1834 on her way back from the de Hagemanns in Copenhagen, and Crompton recorded the visit in her diary with the acerbic observation, 'never had her so bad' (CR/MIC2829/647/23).

Among Crompton's papers is a letter from Sibella Maclean's sister, Breadalbine Maclean, which provides an insight into the effectiveness of Lister's self-representation. Maclean writes that

... I am rather surprised at Miss Lister being considered a lover of money. She used (till of late) I know to spend rather too much & all in good purposes, building bridges schools & on renovating her own old mansion when but half finished she gave me a most pressing invitation to visit her, her great expenditure hindered her going abroad for a long time the last time I heard of her she was at Copenhagen with Lady Harriet Hegerman (a sister of Lady Vere C[ameron, formerly Hobart] my niece you saw in York) ...' (CR/MIC2829/913, emphasis in original).

This short passage offers evidence that Lister was thought of as mercenary, perhaps by Crompton and her circle; that, contrarily, Maclean knew of Lister's philanthropy, but that owing to the expense of trips abroad, this had been curtailed, and that she believed Shibden Hall, which, however, she had not visited, to be an 'old mansion'. The first assertion (though doubted by Maclean) coincides with Lister's own private self-assessment: she *was* fond of money. Maclean's declaration that she *knows* of Lister's good uses of money, and her designation of Shibden Hall as a 'mansion', indicates that she has been informed and convinced of such by Lister herself and members of her aristocratic acquaintance. Whitbread disputes Lister's reputation for good works, suggesting that while 'there are small, isolated incidents of philanthropy, such as taking on the cost of educating the motherless daughter of one of her workers ... mainly the interests of the Lister family and the Shibden estate were the touchstones of her concern' (Whitbread 1992: 91).

According to Maclean's account, Lister's self-narrative successfully translated itself into a public persona. Her self-construction as swashbuckling lesbian lover is, however, not in evidence there. Diary entries for the period during which she was cultivating Vere Hobart's friendship show that her private literary production was also more discreet on this topic. Even encoded diary entries are more circumspect.

I have demonstrated in both this and earlier chapters the significance of Lister's diary and correspondence in her construction of self through the ordering and selection of events and experiences. An important aspect of a self-narrative produced through diary-writing is its flexibility, the daily possibility of adaptation and change. In this chapter I have shown that Lister had a rigid attitude to rules of civility and gentility, even though this may have been old-fashioned or idiosyncratic, but that she constantly defined these rules against her own experience and practice. They did not change in their essentials, but she applied them selectively and with regard to arbitrarily measured conditions. In this respect, she was very like her Halifax neighbours, whose value-system was founded within strict theoretical bounds, but which allowed considerable circumstantial leeway. Lister's flirtations, even affairs, her masculine or eccentric appearance and deportment, and elastic family history, were tolerated as long as she observed certain social niceties. Exactly *which* niceties was decided by a combination of circumstances and timing that required careful monitoring to predict and observe, as Lister herself recognized. After being cut by Miss Morritt and Miss Goodrick, she remarked: 'I should like to stand above them & have it in my power to throw them some civility from higher ground from that on which they stood. But I have some curiosity to know what they think of me. The very fault they find with me - is it in my self, my manner, or my situation in life?' (Whitbread, 1988: 295). In her flirtation with Browne, Lister seemed to misjudge Halifax's mood. Her self-narrative of ancient family was not shared on this occasion by her neighbours and her indiscretion in pursuit of



Browne was *too* public. By cutting the Brownes she challenged the propriety of the rest of Halifax, which had not. Lister's diary shows her emerging and parallel self-narratives as swaggering lover and great lady (two roles that were not mutually exclusive but rather supported each the other) conflicting with her impulse to self-control, her snobbery and sexual obsession. She consolidated these narratives as the years went on, but at this early stage they were not fully developed. Nevertheless, she employs a sophisticated level of literary expertise to produce these self-consciously candid revelations of her experiments with aspects of self-fashioning.

The affair with Browne faltered on until late 1819, when Lister began to receive the anonymous letters apparently in answer to a hoax advertisement in the *Leed's Mercury*. The repetition of this event sixteen years later suggests that Halifax networks ground slow but exceeding small. The anonymous letters and hoax newspaper announcement become a motif by which the local community reconfirms its boundaries and signals its displeasure. Vickery's assertion that 'it is hard to imagine' the minor gentry 'smiling on the likes of ... a mannish lesbian such as Anne Lister' is somewhat vindicated. Though they undoubtedly did occasionally smile both on and at Anne Lister, her Halifax neighbours also reserved behind their smiles a judgement, suspended only as long as it suited, that could be as hostile as the effigy-burning populace, who were after all their tenants and workers. Lister's literary production offered her a way of managing herself in relation to that judgement, of surveying the field, analysing her findings and planning her movements, while providing a secret site in which she could safely stretch the bounds of propriety and resist the pressures of convention. The success of this enterprise may be measured by her ability to maintain, even raise, her station in society, which though it judged her (and even burned her in effigy), did not ostracize or reject her.

Lister was, in many respects, not very different from her friends and acquaintances among the minor gentry of the West Riding. Her diary and letters show that she attached enormous importance to the rules of gentility, propriety and civility, and that outside her usual milieu, among the minor aristocracy, for example, or walking abroad among the ‘rough’ people of York, her self-presentation, *and* her self-narrative were less assured, and thus less adventurous. Her literary self-construction did not take place in isolation from society but was produced through her relations with her peers. With them she could afford to take risks; their bounds, sexual and social, so clearly understood and closely defined, *could* be stretched, and as I have shown, Lister stretched them until the community drew them back. Sometimes Lister was hauled back with them. But sometimes, buoyed up by her comprehensive archive, and her confident and imaginative self-narrative, she took a risk and stayed outside the bounds, and *sometimes*, she felt she was thought none the worse for it:

Speaking of my oddity, Mrs Priestley said she always told people I was natural, but she thought nature was in an odd freak when she made me ... She herself is proud of being thought a friend of mine and I now have certainly made up my mind, I think forever, to like her better than anyone else here (Liddington, 1998: 18).

## Conclusion

I began this study by suggesting that Anne Lister, as she portrays herself in parts of her diary, bears a passing resemblance to the eponymous heroine of Jane Austen's novel, *Emma*. Not only are aspects of Lister's biography similar to those of her fictional counterpart, but her style of writing and language, particularly in the unencrypted passages, have an Austenesque ring to them, almost as though Lister self-consciously constructs for herself the persona of a clever, sharp-tongued provincial gentlewoman. I suggested, too, that the passages in crypt hand have more in common with the erotic revelations of another fictional character, Fanny Hill, from Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, than with Emma, however interesting her relationship with Harriet Smith. Here a different persona seems to emerge, lascivious, experienced, forceful, almost masculine.

The comparisons I offered are light-hearted. Emma and Fanny Hill are literary constructions from the imaginations of their creators; Anne Lister really existed in historical time. I have no evidence that Lister read either novel (indeed, she expressed strong disapproval of the genre), and do not propose that she based her autobiographical self-representation on their fictional characters. Nevertheless, the comparison provoked some useful questions. Where do diary-writers' literary influences emanate from? Is it possible to produce a representation of the self in literature that does not draw on conventional literary devices for delineating character,

depicting event and creating narrative? And do the limitations of that process also contribute to self-definition? These general questions led on to some more specific: what were Lister's models for representing herself in a work of literature; how did she conceive of the project, and was this modified by the processes?

The preceding chapters provided some answers to these questions. They also proposed a way in which the apparently disparate aspects of self depicted in Lister's diary, the proper lady and the lesbian lover, for example, can be reconciled. I argued that Lister worked with the literary tools that were available to her. She had a very wide literary education, and, as I demonstrated, was versed in, among other topics, the classics, philosophy, contemporary medical treatises, modern history, and memoirs, as well as in novels and erotica. Her knowledge of writerly devices was therefore by no means narrowly circumscribed. In fact, her life and daily routines were so pervaded by autodidactic and literary concerns that it would be surprising if her autobiographical writing showed no sign of the interplay between reading and writing, or awareness of the self as both subject and object of textuality. The prim young gentlewoman with her caustic, but conventional (if, with hindsight, ironic), observations on the slavishness to educational fashion of the professional classes and their daughters, 'God be thankful that I have not been and that I am not about to go to this hot bed of young ladies' (SH: 7/ML/E), and the candid, self-revelatory confessions of the young rouée with her '*penchant for the ladies*' (SH: 7/ML/E), are reconcilable if it is considered that Lister drew on generic forms that were appropriate to and enabled her to produce the effects she desired.

The apparent disparity between the different aspects of self revealed in the diary may, then, result from stylistic rather than, or as well as, psychological or historical factors. These latter considerations fall outside the remit of this thesis. I recognize, however, that the work of



Enlightenment and Romantic apprehensions of these. Indeed, a seemingly inexhaustible supply of possible topics is yielded by Lister's voluminous literary, and architectural, production. This thesis is itself a contribution to a field that has yet to be fully defined and opened up, and offers a new viewpoint on the interpretation of her letters and diary.

I have focused on offering a literary critique of Lister's writings: locating them within a literary context, tracing their models and influences, subjecting them to close textual analysis, and examining their effects and functions. In Chapter 1, 'The Writerly Author', I investigated the relationship of the private diarist to notions of authorship at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Lister's conception of 'an author', I argued, was one that was tied to the idea of publication, of a commercial transaction. Rather like the Brontë sisters, she did not seem to associate authorship with the production of private or unpublished writings. This understanding was both limiting and liberating. It prevented her, as it did many women, from ascribing to her own writings the status or value of published work, describing her ambitions as '*castle-building*' (quoted in Brothers, 1996: 119), but did not preclude her from acknowledging the influence of Rousseau's published autobiography on her self-constructive project. On the other hand, it freed her to engage in this project of literary self-construction, and to experiment with personae, style, elaborate sexual and social fantasies and with the literary possibilities of cipher. These procedures, I suggested, fed into a pool of what is usually considered private writing, letters and diaries, shared among her network of women lovers and friends. The texts generated were available to a severely limited public, and while their producers still subscribed to conventional ideas of authorship, they appeared to participate in some kind of communal literary project, publishing their work by 'making it known'. The blurring of the concepts of public and private in Lister's writings, and those of

her circle, indicate that a re-evaluation of these terms may be necessary in relation to their diaries and letters.

Ideas of authorship are closely linked to reading practices. Chapter 2, 'The Readerly Author', focused on the significance of reading to Lister's self-construction, arguing that it was instrumental in her literary production of social and sexual identity. I demonstrated the wide sweep of Lister's reading, from the classics, to farming treatises, to conduct manuals, and contended that this autodidactic programme gave her educational privileges, usually reserved for men, that significantly contributed to the development of her personal ideology, social ambition and sexuality. I also indicated the association between the style and language of Lister's diary and contemporary literary models such as Richardson's epistolary novels, *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, and erotic or pornographic fiction. Although there is again no evidence that she read the former (though it is clear that she had access to the latter), I traced their pervasive influence in the production of her intimate narratives through a comparative examination of passages from Lister's diary and from Richardson and Cleland's novels.

The link between readerly and writerly notions of self-production led to my third chapter, 'The Enrypted Author', an examination of the functions and effects of Lister's cipher. I traced the origins of her crypt hand from its inception at the end of her school days through to its employment as a currency among her network of lesbian friends and lovers. Its role as a means of concealment of private material must be balanced, I suggested, against its interesting, even provocative, visual aspect, which tends to highlight rather than disguise its content. Although without the key this is not immediately accessible, the cipher's idiosyncratic appearance beside Lister's conventional if abbreviated manuscript hand seems to invite attention. I concluded that this is indeed one of its functions: to charge the material

enciphered with an air of mystery, excitement and significance. However, I did not find that material encrypted in Lister's diary was necessarily different from the unencrypted, but rather that the shift from one mode to the other signals either a change of narrative gear, or the existence of parallel, intertwined or even simultaneous narrative strands. By this device, Lister attempted to reproduce the processes of her mind, and represent the experience of thought, a remarkable literary experiment, I argued, in advance of its time. Furthermore, Lister's distribution of the cipher key to women with whom she had been lovers, or to whom she had made amorous advances, not only acknowledged but encouraged a readership, and provided a site for a discourse on woman-to-woman sexuality. The members of the network who could read and use the cipher constituted, in effect, a secret society of women, who in Lister's words were, like Marie Antoinette, 'too fond of women' (Whitbread, 1992: 32).

The following chapter, 'The Amatory Author', offered a detailed investigation into the language and style of Lister's self-construction as lover of women, and her part in the establishment of a network of women who were 'too fond of women'. I set this discussion within the context of the local and historical conditions for lesbian, mannish or cross-dressing women, noting that, despite some local hostility to her self-presentation, Lister appeared to find no lack of lovers, and that indeed her diary and letters suggest that that she was supported by a community of like-minded women. Her local peers acknowledged and tolerated her self-presentation as mannish woman (although in Chapter 5, I went on to demonstrate that this was sometimes an uneasy acceptance). Significantly, Lister expresses little anxiety or guilt about her sexuality, which in characteristically enlightenment terms she attributes to '*natural feeling*' and '*instinct*' (SH: 7/ML/E), distinguishing this from 'artifice' and what was 'done from books' (Whitbread, 1992: 49 & 273). Here I argued that Lister employs a range of



literary styles, from the humorous, to the coolly descriptive, to the polite tones of Romantic friendship, to articulate the many guises she adopts, and her experience of and attitudes to her amours. The diary, I suggested, provided her with a valuable means of surveying and managing relations between her social and sexual selves.

The significance of the diary in negotiating Lister's social experience and developing her relational self was the preoccupation of the final chapter, 'The Relational Author and the Social Self'. I explored the part her writings played in establishing and maintaining her social relations, looking closely at sections of the diary and noting shifts in emphasis and attitude. Lister, I inferred, adjusts her relational self-construction in order to accommodate the changing demands of her social experience. Her flirtation with the slightly *déclassée* Miss Browne, for example, shows her self-narrative ranging from the assertive to the uncertain, between romance and disgust. On the other hand, during her hopeless suit of Vere Hobart, who was several steps above her on the social ladder, she represents herself as patient, measured and proper, even though this is sometimes belied by her representation of the scenes enacted between them. Her conclusion that her income was 'not enough' to satisfy Hobart's needs was reached partly as a result of a retrospective survey of her diary (RAM 67), indicating its importance in defining and managing her social self. I touched on Lister's architectural schemes and argued that these contributed not only to her self-construction as a leading member of polite society, but also to her developing sexual identity. Her sojourn in Paris shows her experimenting in her diary with erotic scenarios in which, I suggested, she enacts masculinist fantasies drawn from romantic and gothic literary traditions. The chapter concluded by examining Lister's relations with local genteel society, proposing that her literary self-construction was vital in mediating the gap between her unorthodox sexual

identity and her conventional social self, and in limiting the damage caused both to her individuated and relational selves by the overt hostility that was occasionally, but uncompromisingly, directed towards her.

In the course of these chapters, the questions with which I began this study are at least partially answered. By examining the literary conditions in which Lister produced her diary, I have shown that notions of authorship were important to the production of her intellectual and emotional identity. By this period these ideas were more commonly associated with the masculine, and carried with them the promise of status, independence, rank and superior intelligence. From an early age, Lister had ambitions to rise in society above what she perceived as the sunken fortunes of her parents. Literature itself could not effect what was also essential to this ascent, the acquisition of wealth, but the educational benefits it conferred lent an air of superiority where rank and money were lacking. Marriage was the more usual route to these objectives for women, but simultaneously with her social ambitions, Lister began to develop her sexual identity, which precluded this option. The diary relates that parallel development, but is at the same time instrumental in producing it within the parameters dictated by notions of authorship and the literary. It provides palpable evidence in support of Carolyn Steedman's argument that written self-narration 'draws into a chronology the inchoate items of a life', and produces meaning 'by the very act of sequencing it, in some kind of order, to some kind of end' (Steedman, 1996: 62).

My account of Lister's diary production in the previous paragraph is a rationalization derived from the selection of her writings used in this study. While it is an expression of my need as a reader to impose a coherent narrative, it is also an effect that Lister's literary devices and style invite. The diary is not a collection of random or spontaneous fragments (such

productions, as Steedman suggests, may always impose 'some kind of order'), but one in which there is a perception of a whole or completed project, evidenced by Lister's writing up retrospectively from notes and her desire 'to get it done in my lifetime' (Whitbread, 1988: 16). It both suggests and attracts a narrative reading, not because it is chronologically sequenced (this, indeed, seems to be a practical rather than strategic consideration), but because Lister conceived of it as a finite project. Her persistence in continuing with this project and extending it into editorial and archival procedures - collecting and collating the letters of friends, for example - may be ascribed to the variety and usefulness of its functions: as an aide-mémoire with which she could monitor and manage social negotiations; as a therapeutic device by which she could accommodate herself to the uncertain and changing conditions of life; as a way of investigating and establishing her relatively unusual sexual identity, at the same time that it advanced an individuated and communal discourse on woman-to-woman sexuality; as a forum for exploring her social ambition; last but not least, as a site for literary experiment. The self, or selves, that she constructed in her diary exist not only within social, geographical and political boundaries, but within the parameters of literary convention and tradition. I do not suggest that therefore Lister's self-construction is 'unreal'. Just because we cannot say whether she practised in real life the sexual techniques she describes does not mean that she did not. Indeed, their presence in the text suggests that they were within the bounds of the possible. Similarly, while, even with corroborative support from contemporary documents, we cannot ever know how Lister really conceived of her sexuality, the diary deploys a sexual discourse that challenges many of our assumptions about pre-twentieth-century sexuality. However, it is useful, I believe, to see the diary as a literary production drawing on literature as its primary influence. Lister's portrayal of her sexual encounters

emerges from a long literary tradition of erotic accounts, stretching from Juvenal's Sixth Satire to Fanny Hill and French manuscript novels. Her self-construction is mediated through a history of autobiographical writing from Ovid to Rousseau's *Confessions*. The breadth and range of her reading shows that far from divorcing herself from the intellectual, emotional and stylistic influence of literature, she actively sought and drew encouragement and strength from it.

This observation is what I believe distinguishes my thesis from the existing body of scholarship on Lister. This has generally examined the diary from the point of view of the social or cultural historian and has been concerned with uncovering evidence which, as Jill Liddington writes, 'offers the historian a unique opportunity to track in enthralling daily detail how one determined masculine woman challenged ... many of the conventional boundaries shaped by class, gender and heterosexuality ... prompting a reappraisal of social relationships at the very dawning of the Victorian era' (Liddington, 1998: xiv). The importance of the scholarship resulting from this approach must not be underestimated. I propose in this thesis that it will be enhanced by a consideration of the mediating role of literature and literary values in the production of the diary and letters. The 'enthralling daily detail' the diary provides is produced within literary constraints, pressures, and the imaginative capabilities of literature. The diary asserts a subjective and unique self, but one that emerges from within the boundaries of existing literary traditions. Even Lister's experimental attempt to reproduce thought relies by its very nature on literary devices and conventions.

Lister inhabited a community of writers and readers as the careful compositions of the young Eliza Raine, and the polished letters of Mariana Belcombe attest. Literary self-construction was not simply an individuated process but one that was reinforced by a larger if

unself-conscious community project. She was not alone in her search for identity, nor, as I have shown, did she always experience herself as ‘unlike anyone I have ever met ... like no one in the whole world’ (Whitbread 1988: x). The diary itself is by no means unique, for as Amanda Vickery demonstrates, extensive diary-keeping was widely practised among provincial gentlewomen of that period. Lister does, however, accomplish something remarkable through those very literary devices that I have identified. She self-consciously constructs an autobiographical identity, conceiving of her diary not simply as spontaneous diurnal fragments, but, by editing and regularly updating her revisions, as a work as a whole. She employs an unusually large range of identifiable literary approaches, showing herself to be aware of the way meaning is reinforced by form and style. The use of cipher allows her to represent ideas and material in different modes and in different narrative gears: the enciphered passages themselves may be seen as an attempt to reproduce the processes of thought. Finally, there seems little doubt that Lister expected, indeed, encouraged a readership, and understood the impact of this expectation on her writing.

This thesis has sought to demonstrate the range and extent of Lister’s sophisticated and self-conscious engagement with such literary concerns in her self-constructive writings. The importance of these in her life, and their interdependence with her relational, amorous and individuated identity is acknowledged by Lister herself in a diary entry dated July 1833. Taking a wry, but sensible tone reminiscent of the older, wiser Emma Woodhouse, she recounts a conversation with her dear friend and lover, Marianna Belcombe, who has complained that she feels excluded from Lister’s London circle of titled friends. Lister’s reassuring reply combines the good sense of the provincial gentlewoman with the warmth of

the lover, and neatly points up the value of her literary pursuits to the establishment of her sense of self:

*Convinced M- I had more common sense than she thought, and valued my own happiness above all things. Could give up the world any day ... Said I still felt as much as ever how insipid the pleasures of the world were compared with those of literature, and with these and anyone to make me happy, I should want no more* (quoted in Brothers, 1996: 115).

## Appendix 1

## Who's Who in Anne Lister's Diary

**Anne Lister (1791-1840).** Born in Halifax. Inherited Shibden Hall, near Halifax, West Yorkshire in 1826. Died of fever in Koutais at foot of Caucasus Mountains, Russia.

### **Anne Lister's family (in alphabetical order)**

Anne Lister (1765-1836), aunt, lived with James Lister at Shibden Hall. Unmarried.

James Lister (1748-1826), uncle, of Shibden Hall, Halifax. Unmarried.

Jeremy Lister (1752-1836), father, served as army captain and was wounded in American War of Independence.

John and Jeremy Lister, brothers, died in early infancy.

John Lister, brother. Died in 1810, aged fourteen.

Joseph Lister (1850-1817), uncle, of Northgate House, Halifax, which Anne Lister inherited on the death of his 2nd wife in 1822.

Marian Lister, sister. Unmarried. Died in 1882.

Rebecca Lister (née Battle), mother. Died in 1817.

Samuel Lister, brother. Died in drowning accident in 1813, aged 20.

### **Tutors**

Mrs Hague and Mrs Chettle, proprietors of dame school at Low Anne's Gate, Ripon, which Lister attended from c.1798-c.1800, and from which she was expelled.

The Rev. Samuel Knight, Anne Lister's tutor in Halifax, from 1806.

Miss Hargrave, proprietor of Manor School, York, during Anne Lister's time there (1805-6).

The school was established in 1789 by her mother, the widow of a York dancing-master.

Mrs Mills, business partner of Miss Hargrave, who taught at Manor School for over twenty years.

Misses Sarah and Grace Mellin of Halifax, tutors during Anne Lister's stay at Shibden Hall 1802-3.

The Rev. George Skelding, Anne Lister's tutor at Market Weighton, 1804-5.

### **The York connection**

Anne 'Nantz' Belcombe, lover, sister of Marianna Belcombe (see below).

Eliza 'Eli' Belcombe, flirtation with Anne Lister. Sister of Marianna.

Henrietta 'Harriet' Belcombe, lover, sister of Marianna. Married Lieutenant-Colonel Milne.

Marian[n]a Belcombe (1790-1868), lover, of Petergate, York, whom Lister met through the Norcliffes. Married Charles Lawton (1771-1860) of Lawton Hall, Cheshire in 1816.

Mrs Marianne Belcombe, mother of Marianna.

Louisa 'Lou' Milne, sister of Marianna. Flirtation with Anne Lister.

Dr Stephen 'Steph' Belcombe, brother to Marianna, whom Anne Lister consulted about Anne Walker's health. Also consultant at the Retreat, York, a Quaker mental asylum.



Dr William Belcombe, father of Marianna, medical practitioner in York and consultant at the Retreat, where Eliza Raine, and subsequently, Anne Walker (see Halifax connections), were committed.

Lady Crawford, cousin of Eliza Raine (see below). Custodian of Raine's finances during her committal and executor of her will on her death.

William Duffin of Red House, York, surgeon, formerly with East India Company. Guardian of Eliza Raine.

Miss Duffin, daughter of William Duffin and first wife. Flirtation with Anne Lister.

Henrietta Crompton (b. 1793), friend and flirtation, of Micklegate. Prolific watercolourist and traveller. Daughter of wealthy banker, Joshua Crompton, who also owned country house at Esholt, twelve miles from Shibden Hall.

Miss Mary Jane Marsh (b.1770), close friend and correspondent, of York. Mistress of William Duffin. Married him in 1826 after his first wife's death.

Isabella 'Tib' Norcliffe (1785-1846), lover, from Langton Hall, a large country estate near Malton, Yorkshire.

Eliza Raine (1791-1839), lover, of Micklegate, York, whom Anne Lister met at Manor School, York. Father surgeon with East India Company. Committed in 1814 to The Retreat, York. Described herself as 'lady of colour'. Under guardianship of William Duffin.

### **Paris connections**

Maria Barlow (b.1786), lover, of Guernsey, whom Anne Lister met during stay in Paris, 1824-5. Widow of a Lieutenant-Colonel killed at the the Battle of Salamanca in 1812.

Mmm de Boyve, flirtation with Anne Lister. Proprietor of Paris pension at 24 Place Vendome where Anne Lister stayed 1824-5.

### **Halifax connections**

Maria Browne, lover. Daughter of Mr Copley Browne, self-made business man of Westfield Cottage, Halifax.

Henry Edwards, business acquaintance, of Pye Nest, near Sowerby Bridge. Anne Walker's uncle (see below).

Mrs Henry Edwards, friend, wife of Henry Edwards.

Ellen Empson, friend, of Halifax.

Caroline Greenwood, flirtation with Anne Lister, of Cross-hills, Halifax. Mentioned in sexual fantasies.

Mrs Greenwood, Caroline's mother, sister to Miss Marsh, wife of local businessman.

William Priestley, friend and business acquaintance, of New House, Lightcliffe. Anne Walker's cousin.

Mrs William Priestley, friend and supporter of Anne Lister.

Mrs Rawson, elderly friend of Anne Lister. Lived at Stoney Royd, Halifax.

Christopher Rawson, business acquaintance, son of Mrs Rawson. Magistrate and banker.

Elizabeth Threlkeld, acquaintance, of Halifax. Diarist and shop-keeper.

Elizabeth Wadsworth, acquaintance and neighbour, of Holdsworth House, Halifax.

Diarist and landowner. Attended Manor School, York.

Ann[e] Walker (1803-1854), lover and partner of Anne Lister from 1834, when she moved to Shibden Hall from her nearby home at Lidgate, Lightcliffe.

Caroline Walker, acquaintance and neighbour, of Walterclough Hall, Halifax. Diarist and landowner. 2nd cousin of Anne Walker. Attended Manor School, York.

### **Aristocratic connections**

Lady Caroline Duff Gordon, flirtation with Anne Lister. Friend of Lady Stuart (see below).

Lady Harriet de Hagemann, friend, whom Anne Lister met during her stay in Paris in 1833. Married to Danish government official.

Vere Hobart, flirtation with Anne Lister during their 5-month stay at St Leonards and Hastings, 1831-2. Niece of Sibella Maclean (see below). Grand-niece of Lady Louisa Stuart. Married Donald Cameron of Lochiel on 31 July 1832. Granted title in September 1832 by virtue of half-brother being 5th Earl of Buckinghamshire.

Breadalbine Maclean, friend, sister of Sibella (see below).

Sibella Maclean, close friend, of Tobermory, whom Anne Lister met through the Belcombes.

Lady Louisa Stuart of Richmond Park, friend, whom Anne Lister met through Sibella Maclean.

Lady Stuart de Rothesay, friend, daughter-in-law of Lady Louisa Stuart. Married to ambassador to Paris.

**Estate and household employees:**

Elizabeth Cordingley, Anne Lister's maid.

Joseph Mann, master miner.

Robert Mann, also miner, brother of Robert Mann.

Samuel Washington, land steward for Anne Lister and Anne Walker.

**Appendix 2****Anne Lister Chronology**

- 1791** Anne Lister born in Halifax on 3 April.
- 1793** Family moves to Skelfler House, Market Weighton.
- 1798** Sent to dame school in Ripon.
- 1800** Expelled from dame school.
- 1801** Educated at home with the Rev. George Skelding.
- 1805** Parlour boarder at Manor School, York. Meets Eliza Raine.
- 1806** Leaves Manor School. She and Raine start keeping encrypted diaries.  
Continues education with private tutor, the Rev. Samuel Knight.
- 1808** Family moves to Halifax.
- 1810** Starts paying long visits to Shibden Hall. Brother John dies, aged fourteen. Meets Isabella ‘Tib’ Norcliffe.

- 1813** Brother Samuel is drowned while stationed with regiment in Cork.
- 1814** Meets Marianna Belcombe. Eliza Raine committed to asylum in York.
- 1815** Moves to live with Uncle James Lister and Aunt Anne Lister at Shibden Hall.
- 1816** Marianna Belcombe marries Charles Lawton, of Lawton Hall, Cheshire.
- 1817** Mother, Rebecca Lister (née Battle) and Uncle Joseph Lister of Northgate House die.
- 1819** Visits Paris for first time with Aunt Anne.
- 1820** Meets Sibella Maclean at York.
- 1822** Visits Ladies of Llangollen with Aunt Anne. Visits Paris with father and sister.
- 1824** Visits Paris seeking cure for venereal infection. Meets Maria Barlow.
- 1826** Uncle James Lister dies on 26 January. Inherits Shibden Hall estate.  
Visits Paris with Aunt Anne.
- 1827** Tours Switzerland and Italy with Maria Barlow and her daughter.

- 1828** Leaves Paris. Spends 2 months in Scotland with Sibella Maclean.
- 1829** Visits Paris with Vere Hobart. Travels on to Belgium with Hobart and Lady Stuart. Tours Rhine with Lady Caroline Duff Gordon.  
Attends Embassy Ball in Paris.
- 1830** Tours Pyrenees with Lady Stuart de Rothesay. Sibella Maclean dies.  
Studying sciences in Paris.
- 1831** Travels to Holland with Marianna Belcombe. Spends winter in St Leonards and Hastings with Vere Hobart.
- 1833** Travels to Paris, then to Denmark via Netherlands and Germany.
- 1834** Anne Walker agrees to be life companion.
- 1835** Anne Walker moves to Shibden Hall.
- 1836** Father, Jeremy Lister, and Aunt Anne Lister die.
- 1837** Inherits Northgate House. Hires architect John Harper to design improvements to Shibden Hall.

- 1838** Travels to Brussels and Paris with Anne Walker, then on to Pyrenees.  
Returns to Shibden Hall in November.
- 1839** Supervising renovation of hall and gardens, and building of West tower.  
Leaves in June for tour of Europe and Russia with Anne Walker. Eliza Raine dies.
- 1840** Travels on to Caucasus with Anne Walker. Contracts fever probably from tick-bite. Makes last diary entry 11 August. Dies at Koutais at foot of Caucasus Mountains on 22 September.
- 1841** In April Anne Walker returns to Halifax with Anne Lister's body after a 7-month trek over land and sea with lead-lined coffin. Buried in Halifax Parish church.



## Appendix 3

## Key to Anne Lister's Crypt Hand

|   |    |    |   |      |    |
|---|----|----|---|------|----|
| a | 2  |    |   | x    | w  |
| b | (  | bb | € | y    | γ  |
| c | )  | cc | ƚ | z    | 9  |
| d | 0  | dd | ⊖ | Mr   | ×  |
| e | 3  | ee | j | Mrs  | ✕  |
| f | u  | ff | ψ | Miss | ≠  |
| g | ∩  |    |   | etc. | ℳ  |
| h | ⊙  |    |   |      |    |
| i | 4  |    |   |      |    |
| j | 4  |    |   |      |    |
| k | l  |    |   |      |    |
| l | δ  | ll | : |      |    |
| m | —  | mm | ⊥ | M    | TT |
| n | ∖  | nn | ⌢ |      |    |
| o | 5  | oo | ! |      |    |
| p | +  | pp | ≠ |      |    |
| q | ll |    |   |      |    |
| r | p  | rr | f |      |    |
| s | =  | ss | ? | sh   | ∧  |
| t | ~  | tt | ℥ | th   | ✓  |
| u | 6  |    |   |      |    |
| v | 9  |    |   |      |    |
| w | 8  |    |   |      |    |

Symbols with a line through  
or with a dot beneath are  
usually repeated.

















## Appendix 4. Figure 4.

### Sample of Anne Lister's Diary. Entry for 7 February 1832.

Abbreviations, spellings and punctuation are reproduced as in the original manuscript. Encrypted words are italicized. I have added spaces between words for clarity. Wider spaces and underlining are as in the original manuscript. I have also included Lister's marginal jottings which allude to the date and time of writing and to the number of letters sent or received.

1832

Feb<sup>y</sup> Tues. 7 fine morn<sup>g</sup> much r<sup>n</sup> in ye night, F 58° at 10a.m. in my r<sup>m</sup> & 46°

8<sup>55</sup> at 10<sup>25</sup> in ye balc<sup>y</sup>. D<sup>wn</sup> at 10½ - St<sup>d</sup> d<sup>wn</sup> talk<sup>g</sup> ab<sup>t</sup> an h<sup>r</sup> - y<sup>n</sup> Mifs H- in my r<sup>m</sup>

1¼ prob. ½ h<sup>r</sup> & b<sup>th</sup> w<sup>nt</sup> out to walk at 12<sup>20</sup> - *I returned to the subject of yesterday morning said I really could not quite understand her & we had a regular explanation I ran over what passed on my return from Battle three weeks ago & what passed yesterday it was evident she had not intended my taking up the thing so seriously & after some length of explanation she said that I at least had told her plainly enough what I meant it was done now <sup>I</sup> was very difficult to manage she could not manage me and she hurried out of the room I followed in a moment or two asked her to come into my room & said well as you say you see it must be one extreme or the other tell me which shall it be I must have a decided answer well then said she let it be as you like I would rather have you as you were before than as it is now she burst into tears I got her one of my pocket*

*handkerchief & without saying a word she almost fell into my arms & gently kissed me which I as gently returned & we went out our conversation turned chiefly to the subject I said how ill I had really felt that I had thought of ascending Mont Blanc in July I might succeed & then I should have the eclat if lost I should be at rest it was plain she had never believed I could really feel so much she now begins to yield her faith & I think we shall understand each other better in future she was delighted to see me so suddenly better & at last she hardly understand why was the reaction I said her choice between the two*

*extremes was enough & her tears I could not resist & this explanation satisfied her*

Mifs H- & I walk<sup>d</sup> by ye cast. & al<sup>g</sup> to ye <sup>London rd.</sup> turnpi. & y<sup>oe</sup> to Fairlight & as far as ye Winchelsea r<sup>d</sup> - in ret<sup>g</sup> stpt so. ti. at Wooll's - look<sup>d</sup> ov. & <sup>both</sup> bght. prints - I 2 of Hast<sup>gs</sup> to give to Miss H- which she laughed & called a peace offering 12 mo.

12L lets. for me in ans<sup>r</sup> to ye advertisemn<sup>t</sup> - ho. At 2<sup>50</sup> - Mifs H- & I agr<sup>d</sup> - ca. to my r<sup>m</sup> for ½ h<sup>r</sup> read<sup>g</sup> ov. all my let<sup>s</sup> ... (SH: 7/ML/E).

**Appendix 5. Figure 1.      Portrait of Anne Lister**



Posthumous portrait of Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, attributed to Joshua Horner, taken from *Shibden Hall, Halifax: A Visitor's Guide* (Westwood and Brown, 1998: 10).



## Appendix 5. Figure 2. Shibden Hall in 1835



Shibden Hall from *Buildings in the Town and Parish of Halifax, Drawn from Nature*. By John Horner, 1835, taken from *Shibden Hall, Halifax: A Visitor's Guide* (Westwood and Brown, 1998: 13).



**Appendix 5. Figure 3.      Design for Improvements to Shibden Hall, 1836.**



Proposed improvement to the South front of Shibden Hall, by John Harper, 1836. taken from *Shibden Hall, Halifax: A Visitor's Guide* (Westwood and Brown, 1998: 13).





**Appendix 5. Figure 4.      Shibden Hall Today.**



South front of Shibden Hall in 1998. Photograph by A. Rowanchild.



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